



**W i l d n e s s   a n d   A r t e f a c t :**  
Re-presenting the Divergent Trajectories of Lakes Gordon and Pedder

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## Declaration of Originality

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Date            12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

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# Abstract

*Wildness and Artefact: Re-presenting the Divergent Trajectories of Lakes Gordon and Pedder.*

The Gordon River Power Development in southwest Tasmania was completed in the early 1970s, creating two large hydro-industrial impoundments: Lakes Gordon and Pedder. The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area now surrounds these impoundments. This project visually interrogated the consequences of impoundment after almost half a century of operation under dissimilar management regimes.

The project's practice-based photographic research focussed on water as the dominant element in hydropower generation, and as a key agent of wildness. Its objective was to produce a body of work that reflected my responses to the impoundments' divergent visual trajectories and the wild processes affecting them and their associated catchments.

Conceptual investigations were directed towards humanity's perceptions of its relationship with the extra-human world. The research drew on a multi-disciplinary theoretical background to support an awareness of alternative perceptual modes and to explore the possibilities offered by an extra-human perception of the subsurface aquatic environment.

Located within the field of landscape photography, the project explored aspects of the genre's development, focussing on two apparently divergent trends, designated *environmental advocacy* and *wilderness deconstructed*. This approach informed research into antecedent landscape photography of the Pedder-Gordon



area and relevant contemporary landscape photography, including apposite aquatic imagery.

Multiple trips to the field locations facilitated the project's experiential investigations. The Pedder Impoundment's divergence was found to be attributable to water's engineered persistence. This enabled the representation of aspects of weather, dam leakage, the development of macrophyte beds, and the persistence of aseasonal wetlands. In the Gordon Impoundment, the principal driver of divergence was the market-driven withdrawal of water. The recently dewatered littoral exhibited the effects of inundation and pre-impoundment logging, as well as its terrestrial and fluvial regenerative processes.

Water's intrinsic wildness was explored through subsurface imagery of both impoundments' inflowing waterways.

The project's outcomes, a suite of original photographic prints and a published performative work, successfully address the research questions posed. These works contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse surrounding conceptions of wildness and of artefact, and their affective representation. Such outcomes are broadly applicable to the fields of landscape photography in a global context and, more specifically, to perceptions of wildness in human-altered environments such as large-scale renewable energy developments adjacent to iconic wild areas.

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## Glossary & Acronyms

- Anthropocentric: Regarding humankind as the centre of existence.
- Anthropogenic: Originating in human activity.
- Ecocentric: A conception that considers the global ecosystem (including humanity) as the centre of existence.
- FSL Full Supply Level (of an impoundment).
- HEC Hydro Electric Commission, the forerunner of the present Hydro Tasmania.
- Littoral: The area, or zone, between high and low water levels. Most commonly used in relation to tidal areas, and also applicable to non-tidal water bodies, such as lakes and impoundments, where the water level is subject to variation.
- Macrophyte: Water plant.
- Otolith: (*Ear stone*) calcium carbonate particles found in the inner ear that help sense gravity and movement.
- Riparian: Riverside: used to describe the environment adjacent to, and affected by, a stream or water body.
- Snigging track: a rough track used to haul cut logs with cable or chains.
- Superficial: Literally, looking at the surface from above: used to describe imagery where this is the predominant perspective.
- TCotA Tasmanian College of the Arts (Hunter Street), University of Tasmania
- TWWHA: Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area
- Zoomorphic: an object in the form of an animal.

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# 1 Foundations

## A Ragged Basin Prelude

The air seemed to sag under the dewy fog; a wet mist that dampened my clothes and bejewelled the spiders' webs cast, somewhat haphazardly, throughout the dawn-greyed desolation of cut logs and chain-sawn stumps. It has been more than forty years since the loggers harvested the forests of Ragged Basin, yet on this morning the atmosphere hung mournful and heavy, muting the distant prelude of the dawn chorus.



**Figure 1.1: Relics of pre-impoundment logging in Ragged Basin, with nascent sedge regrowth (Gordon Impoundment, September 2015).**

It was an ethereal sound: those birds calling to raise the sun. Their songs filtered through the mist, around the spectres of past time: of lucent, bedewed disorder.

My rationality told me (with certainty!) that those birds were singing in the valley across the way, which was still forested: full of food and vibrant with life and community. But the damp coldness on the back of my neck invoked an instinctual haunting: drifting, whispering voices of the annihilated forest in the midst of which I stood.

With a growing sense of incongruity, I inhaled the cool air. I filled my lungs with its freshness and smiled (and shivered). The camera clicked softly, precisely, supported by a tripod and 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. Images flowed onto the camera's data store like the water that, less than four years before, covered this place: millions of electronic bits recording the absence of billions of liquid litres.

Incongruity armoured itself with feelings of displacement and detachment, head-butting my sleepiness. Wake up!

This place was firm and substantial beneath my feet. I have photographic images to prove it! Yet the *place-ness* of the place kept shifting: at one moment clamouring; redolent with the signature smells of two stroke and diesel, the deafening cacophony of chainsaws roaring and trees dying, men sweating and swearing; at another moment lying peacefully entombed, shrouded under tens of metres of orange hued water that lapped and splashed in fluid forgetfulness of what lay below.

The new season's sedges, each bedecked with pearlescent strings of dewdrops, added an increasing blue-greenness to the scene: a thickly strewn token of life amid the desolation.

The freshly risen sun set about its morning mist clearing, though not very convincingly.

The chill in the air increased.

Moving quietly and purposefully downslope, I merged with the fog: a shadow in the grey lightness; another amorphous shape that soon blended into misted insubstantiality; into the myth of that dawning at that place.

The birds continue their threnody.

## A Belated Introduction

My practice-based research project utilised photographic techniques to explore the visual characteristics of two hydro-industrial impoundments, and proximate natural water bodies, that are located within an otherwise sacrosanct area, presently designated as a World Heritage wilderness.

This chapter articulates the bases from which my research project emerged, and briefly outlines its coalescence, background, evolution and completion. It also summarises the project's significance and relevance.

My explorations concentrated, broadly at first, then with increasing definition, on how the wildness inherent in natural systems and processes, particularly those associated with water, interacted with the anthropogenic artefacts of the Gordon River Power Development. Somewhere along the way, I needed to interpret those processes and interactions, translating them into an aesthetic, predominantly visual, vocabulary. That need is realised in the examination exhibition. This exegesis complements the interpretive process.

*Wildness and Artefact* introduces the actuality of the project. Wilderness, wildness, and artefact are defined and key parameters introduced. This leads to an introduction to the two impoundments and their differing water level regimes.

*Rationale* lists the project's objective and its research questions. It also touches on key pragmatic aspects, such as the nomenclature conventions adopted, and the research parameters and limitations.

*Exegesis Structure* summarises the individual chapters to provide a comprehensive outline of the project and its outcomes.

# Wildness and Artefact

The intent of my project is summarised in its title:

*Wildness and Artefact:*

*Re-presenting the Divergent Trajectories of Lakes Gordon and Pedder.*

*Lakes Gordon and Pedder* are two large hydro-industrial impoundments (notionally, the artefacts), located in southwest Tasmania, surrounded by the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and subject to diverse natural processes (notionally, wildness).

*Divergent Trajectories* refers to the different water level regimes applied to each impoundment, and their consequent manifestations. *Re-presenting* is the key, since it introduces both the project's means, (that is, representation) and its artistic intent (to present outcomes based on my research).

The project explores the visual characteristics that the impoundments have evolved since their creation in the 1970s. In order to place these artificial water bodies in a regional context, the project also investigates the visual characteristics of inflowing streams and other dynamic aqueous environments, i.e. wetlands, tarns, mist, rain, clouds.

*Wildness* and *Artefact* are key descriptors. Superficially, they appear to offer a duality: suggesting that something is either wild or an artefact. In truth, the terms are conceptually separate and often interlinked. The examination of wildness and artefact provides the overarching narrative of the project.

## Wilderness, Wildness and Artefact (by Definition)

### *Wilderness*

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) embodies modern, anthropocentric notions of wilderness. The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *wilderness* as ‘an uncultivated and still-wild region of forest, scrub, bush, desert, etc.’

The TWWHA Management Plan indicates that the commonly recognised qualities of wilderness are naturalness and remoteness (DPIPWE 2016, pp. 173-7). Implicit in the Management Plan’s discussion of wilderness is that it refers to a defined geographic area:

A wilderness area is an area that is of sufficient size, remoteness and naturalness to enable the long-term integrity of its natural systems, diversity and processes, the maintenance of cultural landscapes and the provision of a wilderness recreational experience (ibid., p. 175).

The Management Plan also acknowledges that:

The use of the term ‘wilderness’ to describe the TWWHA is problematic for some Aboriginal people who believe the term wrongly implies that the TWWHA is a landscape empty of human culture and that its use, in this way, lends weight to a denial of the full extent of Aboriginal occupation and survival in the TWWHA, and of contemporary Aboriginal rights (ibid., p 103)<sup>1</sup>.

This acknowledgement highlights the fact that anthropogenic interventions have been applied to the region in both pre- and post-colonial times. The TWWHA Management Plan cites evidence of human occupation dating back to the late Pleistocene epoch (ibid., pp. 38-43).

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<sup>1</sup> The connotations of wilderness as ‘empty of people’ is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2: *Theoria / A Word (or Two) About Wilderness*.

Tasmanian Aboriginal elder, Patsy Cameron records:

...the TWWHA was home to and utilised by Tasmanian Aboriginal people since the very beginning of human consciousness in art, birth, burial and ceremony. (ibid., p. v).

The artefacts of that occupation have long since blended into the area's landscape patterns to become, to the unaccustomed eye, indistinguishable from what is today considered *wilderness*.

### *Wildness*

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *wild* (of which wildness is a state of being wild) variously as:

- (plant or animal) in its original natural state; not domesticated or cultivated;
- not civilised, barbarous;
- (of scenery, etc.) having a conspicuously desolate appearance;
- unrestrained, disorderly, uncontrolled;
- tempestuous, violent.

Jane Bennett (2010, p. 2) described wildness as 'a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies'. This supports her associated term, *vital materiality*, which describes the ability of things (systems, processes, energies) to subvert human designs and desires and which demonstrate trajectories of their own.

Her approach informs my conception that wildness exists in those aspect of dynamic systems that appear uncontrollable, unpredictable, and fundamentally unknowable. Wildness is irrational, often overwhelmingly energetic and is a manifestation of the wonder, or terror, that humanity experiences when exposed to the infinitude of the greater universe: an indifferent, extra-human Otherness.

For my project, *wild* is used to describe the uncontrolled natural processes that prevail in the studied region, especially those associated with water.

### *Artefact*

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *artefact* as ‘a product of human art or workmanship’.

The resource exploitation that accompanied European colonisation extended to the Pedder-Gordon region through the logging and removal of the endemic Huon pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*) (Gibson *et al.* 1991, p. 215). This timber is valued for boat building as well as by the furniture and specialty timber industries. The principal artefact of that exploitation lies in absence: the absence of mature *Lagarostrobos* and the removal of the environmental services that such long-lived organisms provided.

Other, more recent, forms of resource exploitation include the hydropower development that created the two impoundments, and industrial logging along the eastern and southern shores of the Gordon Impoundment. Both activities preceded the area’s designation as World Heritage.

Interestingly, the Pedder Impoundment is included within the TWWHA, while the Gordon Impoundment and adjacent forestry areas are specifically excluded from it (Parks and Wildlife Service 1999, p. 216). Thus, one of the hydro-industrial artefacts (Lake Pedder) is designated as wilderness, while the other (Lake Gordon) is excluded from the wilderness area: a duality that underlies the divergence that my project is exploring.



Wildness, in the form of weather, has affected these hydro-industrial artefacts since their construction, further blurring the boundaries between the terms. Vegetative regrowth in the impoundments' littoral areas, for example, could be considered as both wildness (caused by natural processes) and artefact (produced by the artificial manipulation of an impoundment's water level).

Whilst initially the distinction between wildness and artefact may have appeared clear, it can be seen that the terms intersect, overlap, and may, at times, be indistinguishable. This conundrum provides one of the enduring lines of investigation and discourse for the project.

## **The Impoundments**

My project explores the visual characteristics of Lakes Gordon (the Gordon Impoundment) and Pedder (the Pedder Impoundment). These two hydro-industrial artefacts hold approximately 35% of Tasmania's impounded water and form the largest water storage in Australia (Hydro Tasmania 2011, p. 28). They are similar in surface area (272 and 242 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively), although somewhat different in morphology and operating regime.

The Pedder Impoundment, which captures the headwaters of the Huon River and almost completely engulfs the Serpentine River, is relatively shallow. It holds a total volume of 3.3 km<sup>3</sup>. The Gordon Impoundment, which intercepts the flow of the Gordon River and a number of its tributaries, is deeper and holds a total water volume of 11.9 km<sup>3</sup> (Hydro Tasmania 2011, p. 28).

## Divergent Trajectories

The impoundments' water levels have been managed differently from each other since their creation, driving their divergent appearance.

### *The Pedder Impoundment*

The Pedder Impoundment's water level is constrained by the provisions of the *Electricity Supply Industry Restructuring (Savings and Transitional Provisions) Act* 1995: (14.1(c)) to vary no more than 1.53 m below full supply level (FSL). Because of this limitation, only about 11%  $(0.37 \text{ km}^3)^2$  of the impoundment's volume is available for electricity generation at any one time, although this volume can be replenished and transferred to the Gordon Impoundment as frequently as local precipitation and inflow allows. Hydro Tasmania (2011, p. 28) reports that the Pedder Impoundment provides about 41% of the water used by the Gordon Power Station.

Constrained by the specified range, the Pedder Impoundment's littoral (the area between low and high water levels) is small for a water body of its size, and especially so for a hydroelectric impoundment. The effects of this persistently high water level are discussed in detail in Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places / The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence*.

### *The Gordon Impoundment*

The Gordon Impoundment is operated almost exclusively for the purpose of hydroelectricity generation. Its waters feed directly into the Gordon Power Station at the western end of the impoundment.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an approximate value, calculated by multiplying the impoundment's surface area by the legislated depth.

Historically, Gordon's water level has varied by some 40 m over approximately 18-year cycles. The patterns of draining and filling of the Gordon Impoundment are presented in Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places / The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal*.

## Rationale

Being practice-based, my project utilised numerous field trips to acquire imagery for the production of artworks related to the research questions (listed below).

As the impoundments are dependent on their catchments, representative inflowing streams were also investigated. The small volumes of water that incidentally escape the dams were likewise explored, as were reference streams outside the impoundments' catchments.

Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places* provides the locations of the field sites.

## Field Practices

My field-based operating paradigm was one of solitude: the trips were conducted solo, and on most of them I had no other human contact. I sought an isolation that provided the creative space of personal reflection as well as separation from societal noise.

This approach acted to underpin many of the strategic and operational decisions that I made during the fieldwork. While I necessarily utilised anthropogenic objects and technologies in this activity (e.g. transport, shelter, food) my approach was to be as open as possible to the wildness around me. It yielded significant, and often unanticipated, results.

Similar evolutions occurred in my photographic approach. I chose to photograph receptively rather than in a pre-planned or overly directed manner. The process of embracing receptivity was based on the notion of allowing the experience of place. If I focussed on what affected me and how I responded to it, I would, I hoped, authentically represent the place or process that was my subject.

The techniques for achieving this relied on my personal perspectives, photographic skills, and ecological interpretation. For the latter, I drew on some twenty years of professional experience as a freshwater ecologist, the last ten of which involved varying degrees of research, monitoring, and management of Tasmanian hydroelectric impoundments.

## **An Objective**

The overall objective of my project was to produce a body of work that reflected my perceptions of, and responses to, aspects of the impoundments' divergent visual trajectories and the wild processes affecting them and their associated catchments.

## **Research Questions**

My research focussed substantially on the principal element involved: water. Theodor Schwenk highlighted the value of such an approach. In *Sensitive Chaos* (1965, pp. 9-10), he described how technological developments have turned humanity's conception of water away from its inherent fluid being – as '...the universal element, not yet solidified but remaining open to outside influences, the unformed, indeterminate element' – to a more exploitative attitude based on its commodification and industrial utility.

Based on the above rationale, my research questions were:

1. Since water is a primary climatic agent in these impoundments and related catchment areas, and therefore a key agent of wildness, what visual aspects of water might be employed to represent its wildness?
2. What key aspects of the structural artefacts and management of the impoundments are relevant to the exploration of their divergent characteristics (if any), or other significant change?
3. What relationship does water's wildness have to the processes driving divergence and how might this be visually represented?
4. How might these considerations be applied to further the visual discourse relevant to contemporary landscape imagery?

## Research Parameters and Limitations

I chose not to directly address the political and historical aspects of the construction of the power scheme. Others have extensively covered these not-unimportant matters, most recently Natasha Cica's *Pedder Dreaming* (2011). See also, David Stephenson's *Skeletons* (2003), Bob Brown *et al.* *Lake Pedder* (1986), and Max Angus' *The World of Olegas Truchanas* (1975).

In order for the fieldwork to be effectively completed within the timeframe available, I limited the project's investigations to the various manifestations of water (as dynamic atmospheric conditions and ephemeral processes), and its extent in terms of:

- the number of locations explored within the impoundments' littoral areas;
- the number of reference locations examined; and
- the number of inflowing streams investigated.

The fieldwork was conducted under the aegis of the University of Tasmania's Workplace Health and Safety protocols and policies, as administered by the Tasmanian College of the Arts (TCotA), Hunter Street.

Solo fieldwork requires careful preparation in terms of work planning, weather, safety, and contingencies. Accordingly, the fieldwork was subject to a rigorous Risk Assessment and it adhered to Field Activity Plans prepared for each trip. A system of reporting when leaving and returning to mobile phone coverage was followed for each trip, and an emergency Personal Locator Beacon was carried at all times.

The fieldwork also undertook precautionary measures against the spread of *Phytophthora* by maintaining clean, mud free equipment and utilising the wash-down stations located at sites leading into the TWWHA.

## **Nomenclature**

It is a convention to name artificial impoundments *lakes*, and this was the case with both impoundments: they are officially named Lake Gordon and Lake Pedder. However, sensitivities exist in the case of the Pedder Impoundment, which was created by flooding the original Lake Pedder, a water-body that still exists some 15 m below the impoundment's surface. Colloquially, the Pedder Impoundment is called 'Fake Pedder', and legislatively it is termed, 'the impounded waters of the Huon and Serpentine Rivers'.

I preferentially use the term *impoundment* rather than *lake*, except where the official name is required, or where some confusion might arise.

## Exegesis Structure

The exegesis comprises six chapters (plus references and an appendix).

This chapter, *Foundations*, outlines the project, its background and rationale. It provides necessary definitions, identifies pertinent constraints, and details operational information to articulate the project's research questions.

*Foundations* is introduced by an experiential work, *A Ragged Basin Prelude*, which, in its imaginatively subjective approach, contrasts the objective style of the rest of the chapter. Its positioning at the start of the exegesis is deliberate and its mode of presentation is significant. Similar experiential episodes litter later chapters. The experience of place is a key discursive thread of the exegesis and its articulation is fundamental to the project's practice-based outcomes.

The conceptual background for the project is established in Chapter 2: *Theoria*.

Drawing on the works of key theorists, *Theoria* discusses the ontological paradigms of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, along with the related notions of wilderness and wildness. Based on its centrality to the project, water's dynamic entity is explored in terms of how it is perceived and its agency.

Alternative models of photography-as-art, and of not-knowing, are discussed, with reference to relevant theorists. Experiential examples from the project are used to illustrate aspects of these conceptions.

Chapter 3: *Praxis* deals with the contextual foundations of the project within the field of landscape photography. Works of prominent landscape photographers guide my project through a history of technological developments which has produced diverse conceptions, motivations, and societal expectations.

Two apposite threads running through the broad canvas of landscape photography, *Environmental Advocacy* and *Wilderness Deconstructed* are explored. These have particular relevance to my project, which traverses both domains.

Perceived shortcomings of prevailing trends in wilderness photography, articulated by key theorists, are discussed and alternative approaches explored. Examples of my previous work are presented, which provide access to my practice-based approaches to this project.

Building on the preceding foundations, Chapter 4: *Evolution* describes the development of my project, in terms of methods, locations and explorations. It establishes my primary means of representation to be via full colour photographic prints.

Multiple field trips helped identify underlying drivers of visual divergence between impoundments. In the Pedder Impoundment, the engineered persistence of water has produced changes in the way weather, wetlands and shoreline vegetation have responded. The Gordon Impoundment demonstrated the effects of an extensive market-driven withdrawal of water.

The field research also explored subsurface images of flowing water in associated streams. This work led to examination of the streams' extra-human information systems. It also prompted an investigation of visual biases and their effects on perceptions of the subsurface environment.

Chapter 5: *Revelation*, describes the outcomes of the project in terms of the examination exhibition and the resolution of its research questions. It discusses



the structure of the exhibition, and details the prints exhibited. The chapter also discusses a peer-reviewed publication from the project.

Chapter 6: *Gnosis* resolves the project by examining what it produced, its significance to the academic-art milieu, and its relevance to various discourses.

My project comprehensively represents the visual effects of more than forty years of hydro-industrial operations in southwest Tasmania. It extends discourse on Tasmanian landscape photography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with an emphasis on wild locations. It also advances discourse on humanity's interrelationships with the extra-human world through its representations of the sub-surface aquatic environment.

The project's outcomes are relevant to anthropocentric and ecocentric ontological discourses, as well as that of self and place. They also address a number of societal discourses, including those related to renewable energy, river regulation, environmental management, and Lake Pedder's restoration.

## 2 Theoria

### Introduction

My chosen medium, photography, and the project's geographic location within the boundaries of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area establishes the project within the field of contemporary landscape photography, with an implied reference to the sub-genre of wilderness photography. These are global aesthetic domains, each with an extensive literature and a prodigious body of works. The discussion in this chapter is centred on those ontological aspects of landscape photography that provide the project's conceptual and theoretical foundations.

My research explores concepts and ideas relating to humanity's interactions with the wild, extra-human world. These encompass the representation of (apparently) wild and (industriously) artificial environments. As well, my concentration on wild aspects of water has revealed concepts that require development and elucidation.

This chapter begins with an example: an image from the Huon River upstream of the Pedder Impoundment. *A Breadth of Conception* introduces a number of discursive avenues that serve to position the project conceptually.

*Ontological Models* explores the paradigm of ecocentrism: a conception that is advancing discourse on humanity's interrelationships with the extra-human world. It contrasts this with the dominant extant paradigm of anthropocentrism.

*A Word (or Two) About Wilderness* discusses conceptions of wilderness, and the issues raised by its colonialist-capitalist manifestation. It considers how such binaries might be transcended.

*Toward Recognizing the Entity of Water* posits that water's agency and extra-human beneficence warrants the consideration of its totality: its entity. Water is the principal visual component of my project, which focuses on water in its various manifestations, including its absence.

*Photography & Ways of Not-knowing* considers alternative approaches to the utility of photography-as-art, and epistemological aspects of uncertainty. It illustrates how such alternative approaches may facilitate the use of water as a metaphor for wildness, and as a provocation for revisiting humanity's inherent interconnections with the wild.

## A Breadth of Conception

As discussed in Chapter 1, *Foundations*, my project aims to represent the divergent evolutions of two hydro-industrial artefacts and their catchments, set within a designated wilderness area of global significance. It set about achieving this by exploring the nature of wildness, among other things. The first image I captured for this project, Figure 2.1, expresses three key aspects of my research.

The photograph:

- represents water (as the dominant element of southwest Tasmanian weather);
- captures two inherent characteristics of flowing water – form and energy; and
- illustrates that, under the influences of volume and gravity, this water expresses a wildness that is readily discernible.



Figure 2.1: *Untitled (130831301)*: The Huon River upstream of the Pedder Impoundment.

The image shows a fast-flowing stream cascading over orange-red rocks. It is a literal rendering of the scene. The visual cues, such as the implied angle of view and spatial recession, the apparent direction and pattern of light, and the moderate amount of blurring that allows the underlying shapes of the rocks to be perceived, are consistent with a conventional reading of a landscape image, despite its lack of a horizon.

As an interested percipient, I might also respond to this image emotionally and instinctively. The image has a pleasing, almost velvety, visual texture. The form is simple and harmonious. The tonality is congruent and bright. There is power here, tending more to the ordered than the chaotic (although chaos is suggested, just out of frame). There is also an ambiguous image depth, alluded to by the light and shade, and implied by the dynamic flow. It relies on a certain familiarity with this type of environment, and it leads to an undefined place that is the province of the individual viewer.

As the photographer, I can't avoid adding my personal, embodied experience to my reading: the coldness of the water; the feel of the flow against my legs; the ozone-freshness of the air mingling with the rainforest's distinctive odours; and the subtlety of the slowly changing patterns of light and shade.

These various perceptions underlie the imagery of my project. Some images will be more literal landscapes than others, which might engender imaginative, emotional, or visceral responses.

Art theory and ecological practice rely on rationality, as indeed does this exegesis. And rationality relies on a fundamentally anthropocentric, dualist conceptual model: cause and effect; subject and object; wilderness and

civilisation; even zero and one. This categorical differentiation is important to allow the reduction in model complexity to a level that suits human perception.

Much of civilised life hinges on accepted dualities. My project could not exist without them. And yet, there is much to be experienced in my imagery that is not always amenable to rational analysis.

The works presented in my project and discussed in this exegesis are designed to lead an interested percipient from the literal formality of conventional landscape imagery (which is powerful, nonetheless) into a realm where imagination and instinct play an increasing role in interpretation of the works. This move away from a literal, rational interpretation is intended to support my contention that a true apprehension of human relationships with the extra-human world relies on an ontological paradigm that situates humanity in an important, yet peripheral, role rather than at its centre.

Further, this approach relies on the recognition that a percipient's personal experience necessarily informs their perceptions of the world. As Michael Crawford pointed out, an individual's embodied experience - his or her own perception achieved through interacting with the outside world - is not solely the result of a mentally constructed representation. Rather it is the result of living and acting in the world, and thereby accumulating somatic experience (Crawford 2016, p. 50).

## Ontological Models

The physical landscape is baffling in its ability to transcend whatever we would make of it. It is as subtle in its expression as turns of the mind, and larger than our grasp; and yet it is still knowable. The mind, full of curiosity and analysis, disassembles a landscape and then reassembles the pieces... trying to fathom its geography. At the same time the mind is trying to find its place within the land, to discover a way to dispel its own sense of estrangement.

Barry Lopez (2001, p. xxii).

Ontologically this project subscribes to a conception of inclusive nature that is invoked by an ecocentric perspective, as described by Patrick Curry (2008, p. 51). Ecocentrism rejects the anthropocentric worldview that locates all agency and value in humanity alone.

Jane Bennett addressed this issue in her book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. The book sought to reframe the way contemporary Western society relates to the extra-human world. In it, Bennett reveals a cogent ontological paradigm, which acknowledges that more-than-human *things* have agency that modern humanity ignores to its detriment. Her rationale extends received concepts of agency, action, and freedom. Her stated aim was to dissolve empirical dualities that limit conceptions of being, and to establish a political discourse that includes the contributions and interactions of extra-human agencies (Bennett 2010, p. x).

As discussed in the previous section, my art extends into metaphor, ambiguity and instinctive somatic perception. I am interested in ways of looking and thinking that transcend rationality and its formative dualities: at reconsidering the anthropocentric paradigm that we, as self-aware beings, intuitively adopt.

Both Curry's and Bennett's works provide useful foundations.

## Ecocentric Propositions

Bill McKibben (1998, pp. 5-6) raised the question of just what *nature* represents and whether humanity is a part of it or separate from it. He argued that humanity's overexploitation of nature's bounties has ramifications that may drive perspectives to even more anthropocentric extremes as the consequences of our species' profligacy are manifested. He noted that the physical and climatic stability on which human civilisation is based is fundamental to our species' self-confidence and subsequent hubris. In consequence, anthropogenic destabilisation of climate is capable of undermining the foundations of our civilisation.

In a similar vein, Arturo Escobar (1999, p. 1) queried why, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern forms of knowledge had proven unable to find ways of dealing with nature without destroying it. He discussed alternative ways in which nature is culturally constructed while, at the same time, acknowledging its biophysical entity (ibid., pp. 2-5). Within this model he derived three coexisting regimes: *organic nature*, *capitalist nature*, and *techno-nature*. The first two of these are directly relevant to my project.

*Capitalist nature* produced new ways of seeing (which guided the West's cultural construction of nature), new ways of relating to place (through the development of maps and the codification of territorial landscapes as national identities) and a commodification of nature through technological and scientific developments (ibid., pp. 6-7). The resultant culture-nature duality, while intrinsic to *capitalist nature*, is regarded as limiting, and at odds with alternative conceptions.



Escobar (ibid., pp. 7-9) considered the ontological inseparability of nature and society as the defining feature of *organic nature*. This notion prompts an interrogation of ways in which other societies have represented their cognitive worlds. This interrogation includes distinctions within the biological; the languages used to express such distinctions; the practices that produced them; and the relationships between meaning and uses of biological entities. As well, it questions the extent to which such representations identified or acknowledged the concept of a discrete human nature.

Escobar posited that such cultures recognised the intrinsic embeddedness of humanity within the natural world; experiencing a complex set of social interactions with place ‘conceived as a multidimensional entity’. Examples of such societal embeddedness are discussed in *Alternative Worldviews*, below.

Escobar (ibid., p. 9) concluded that Western society’s fundamental nature-culture duality, which underpins a conception of separateness, was no longer tenable.

Val Plumwood (1998, p. 675) pointed out that the nature-culture dualism distorts our perspectives by implying that places can be only wilderness or cultural product. This acts to erase the complexities of a place’s interactions between culture and nature: complexities that make it unique. This conception is of key relevance to my project, which situates itself squarely at the interface between wildness and anthropogenic artefact. Plumwood (ibid., pp. 677-8) prescribed a non-dualistic conception of the wild Other brought about by a ‘decolonising’ of the mind: moving away from the colonialist-capitalist strictures that are deeply embedded in Western culture. The civilisation-wilderness duality is discussed more fully in *A Word (or Two) about Wilderness*, below.

## Alternative Worldviews

Escobar (1999, p. 10) proposed an approach that refuses to separate knowing from doing and these from being. This would allow an effective interrogation of the dualisms and asymmetries of nature and culture, and the embodied aspect of knowledge. Such an approach, he felt, would support ethnographic arguments about the continuity of nature and culture.

Tim Ingold's paper, *Ways of Mind-Walking: Reading, Writing, Painting*, introduced an anthropological aspect that is directly relevant to this discussion. His basic thesis is that, ontologically speaking, the imagined and the experienced are conceptually similar. Ingold (2010, p. 15) used culturally different perspectives to explore this idea. He described the pre-cartographic nature of the medieval *mappamundi* and its similarities with traditional Yolngu painting. Both invoke an internal, non-cartographic reality, that is part culturally significant mythology and part an internalised topology.

Far from being the crude effort at cartographic representation that we take it for today, the *mappamundi* was a model for (not of) the phenomenal world, the purpose of which was not so much descriptive as prescriptive: to establish a foundational template for the ordered disposition of figurative elements... that marked out places along ways of thought (Ingold *ibid.*, p. 18).

Ingold (*ibid.*, pp. 19-20) concluded that Yolngu paintings might be considered as maps in their original, pre-cartographic conception: as instruments for revealing inner realities, rather than external surfaces. He indicated that paintings such as the *mappamundi* and those of the Yolngu could be interpreted repeatedly, with a different reading each time.

Howard Morphy's book, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*, addressed issues that relate to knowledge systems beyond the modern

Western paradigm. Morphy (1991, p. 6) perceived Yolngu art as a communication system: creating meaning through symbolic encoding within the artworks. Such communication, he contended, emphasises the context of use and interpretation as integral parts of the system. In a number of ways Morphy's analysis relates to extra-human Otherness systems almost as well as to the non-Western (and human) Otherness of Aboriginal knowledge.

Randy Bertolas explored cross-cultural perceptions of wilderness in the Quebec region of Canada. He reported that the indigenous Cree language had no word for the Western idea of wilderness (Bertolas 1998, p. 100) and that the Cree saw themselves as living in intimate, continuous association with their land.

Bertolas (ibid., p. 109) found that non-indigenous survey respondents tended to conceive wilderness in the terms expressed by the U.S. *Wilderness Act* of 1964: as natural spaces defined by an absence of human occupation or impact; they tended to perceive it in abstract rather than personal terms. In contrast, the Cree perceived their land as self-defining: often in a personalised narrative form (ibid., p. 106). This experiential conceptual mode reflects that expressed by the Tasmanian Aboriginal notion of *Connection to Country*, as discussed by Maggie Walter (DPIPWE 2016, p. 57). Walter indicated that such a connection needs to be 'culturally experienced and integrated' (rather than abstracted and distant).

To my mind, these alternative worldviews are examples of the relational approach intrinsic to an ecocentric perception. They mesh with Escobar's conception of *organic nature*, discussed above. They also go further.

I see Ingold's paper as an introduction to the more instinctive, imaginative aspects of my project's imagery: entrée to the idea of an evolutionary

underpinning of pre-rational instinctive feelings. That, to be affective, imagery has, at times, to reach beyond a figurative representation and stir the 'generative impulse that is life itself' (Ingold 2010, p. 17). To achieve that aim some of my imagery, especially that associated with the representation of wildness in water, seeks to access an instinctive visceral response through a non-figurative mode of representation.

Morphy alluded to a two-way knowledge system, such that:

Yolngu live in a world that includes both European and Aboriginal institutions, systems of knowledge, and languages: they are influenced by both (Morphy 1991, p. 4).

To me, this acknowledges the possibility of holding, and utilising, both anthropocentric and ecocentric models: nesting them, as it were - the narrow, limited former within the broader, expansive latter - to hold both modalities without necessarily invoking cognitive dissonance. They are, after all, conceptual tools: each suited to different discursive purposes.

And thus, one of my underlying purposes is to produce imagery that may be perceived in multiple ways. It may encompass aesthetic representations where form and composition offer interpretative cues, within the context of the image itself. It may be as representations that express my experiential responses to landscapes in which the wild and artificial are (naturally) interwoven. It may extend to meaningful representations of Otherness, as expressions of a broader extra-human knowledge or communication system, such as that intrinsic to flowing water. This final topic is discussed more fully in *Towards Recognising the Entity of Water*, below.

## A Word (or Two) About Wilderness

The term *wilderness* has become so clichéd and ubiquitously applied as to render it almost meaningless, especially in a landscape photography context. As Richard Flanagan put it:

In the roots of the Treblinka conifers the ashes of the Jews; in the roots of the south-west rainforest the ashes of the Kooris. The idea of wilderness is the enemy of the act of remembering (Flanagan 1991, p. 7).

Despite this study being conducted in an area described and managed as a wilderness area, my imagery should not be construed as representing *wilderness*. The area is demonstrably not wilderness, by the modern definition of the term. In the broadest sense, the very sunshine and rain that drive the energetic interactions of this wild area have been impacted by human actions. The sunlight streams through an anthropogenic hole in the ozone layer. The rainfall is occasionally ‘enhanced’ by cloud seeding.

This section looks first at, then beyond, the modern definition and connotations of wilderness and its inherent limitations, in order to seek a more pertinent conception.

### Derivations of Wilderness

The progenitor of the wilderness definition given in Chapter 1: *Foundations / Wilderness and Artefact*, is the United States’ *Wilderness Act* of 1964. While this legislation (and its derivatives elsewhere in the world) established the modern approach to wilderness management, it also acted to perpetuate concepts that are based on its intrinsic civilisation-wilderness duality, and the fallacy of absence:

A wilderness... is hereby recognised as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man... (US Congress 1998, p. 121).

Val Plumwood (1998, pp. 677-8) showed how this defined absence of (European) humans acts not only to deny the occupation of the land by indigenous peoples, but also confirms the nullity of nature itself.

Donna Reeves (2009, p. 75) suggested that understanding the historic legal precedents is a way to begin reshaping the wilderness concept and 'repairing the nature-culture split'. She reported that, in early 19<sup>th</sup> century America:

... the presence of Native American people was not only essential for an area to be called wilderness, but that their occupation of the land marked the very boundaries of wilderness (ibid., p. 77).

Indeed, the same legal opinion concluded that when the indigenous peoples ceased to occupy the land it became *terra nullius* rather than wilderness (ibid., p. 89). This allowed the government to claim the land for its own purposes. Thus, modern received notions of 'untrammelled' wilderness derive from land that first needed to be emptied of its indigenous occupants.

The definition of civilisation, based on Lockean principles of productive labour and private property, arose from the same early 19<sup>th</sup> century legal opinions that created the civilisation-wilderness duality (ibid., p. 86). These gave the ever-expanding (European, civilised) population legal ascendancy over those inhabitants of wilderness, who were deemed to be 'children of nature' with 'diminutive rights of occupation'.

Many indigenous cultures had no conception of, or name for, either *nature* or *wilderness*, primarily because the distinction made no sense in their societal construct (see, e.g., Escobar 1999, p. 4; Bertolas 1998, p. 100). Plumwood (1998, pp. 677-8) expanded on this outcome, suggesting that the colonialist assumption of emptiness and nullity of nature (devoid of both labour and property), as well

as justifying the erasure of indigenous societies, also contributed to modern perplexities over wilderness.

Thus, for my project's purposes, the modern definition of wilderness is irredeemably mired in colonialist-capitalist justifications for the appropriation of indigenous land, the displacement of 'uncivilised' peoples, and the denial of any intrinsic value in wild nature *per se*.

In pre-industrial Western cultures, much of the mythology around wilderness derives from religious texts. Hindy Najman (2006, pp. 103-13) investigated the concept of wilderness in ancient Judaism. He found that the wilderness concept involved three primary roles:

- as a place of suffering (exile);
- as a place of purification (distant from the corruption of the city); and
- as a place of revelation (through divine meditation).

My responses to *wilderness* echo Najman's ancient Judaic conceptions (shed of overt religious connotations) much more congruently than the modern colonialist-capitalist one.

## **The Civilisation – Wilderness Duality**

Richard Flanagan succinctly expressed the conundrum inherent in the wilderness-civilisation duality:

The world is a chaotic puzzle made up of myriad fragments. Not two diametrically opposed orders, the human and the non-human. Our age should have had enough of opposing orders (Flanagan 1991, p. 7).

William Cronon (1998, pp. 484 & 490) presented the central, and ultimately absurd, paradox of such a duality: that if humanity (civilisation) is separate from nature (wilderness), then a human presence within the wilderness must, by

definition, destroy it. This, he felt, left little scope for exploring what a sustainable, responsible human place in nature might look like. As an 'indispensable corrective to human arrogance', he advocated a recognition of:

...nonhuman nature as a world we did not create, a world with its own independent, nonhuman reasons for being as it is... (ibid., p. 492).

The above statement reflects the ecocentric paradigm, discussed earlier. Using similar terms, Val Plumwood proposed acknowledging a continuity of interaction and interdependence:

...recognizing nature in what has been seen as pure culture and culture in what has been seen as pure nature (Plumwood 1998, p. 675).

Cronon (1998, pp. 493-4) offered similar thoughts. By defining wilderness in terms of wonder, he proposed acknowledging the wildness inherent in the garden as well as in the wilderness: a process that requires abandoning the duality that labels such places as either artificial or pristine.

In terms of my project, this is the approach I choose: one that represents the wildness I experience in the context of anthropogenic artefacts, such as the impoundments, set in an otherwise wild area. The context is, demonstrably, neither wilderness nor civilisation. It sits somewhere in between: in the continuum of interactions between the artefacts and the extra-human Otherness that abides in this location.

## Toward Recognising the Entity of Water

One of humanity's primal linkages with natural processes is through water. At the same time, water represents an agency of wildness that is fundamentally indifferent to humanity. As such it provides a useful metaphor for the ecocentric



paradigm discussed in *Ontological Models*, above. Theodor Schwenk (1965, p. 14) succinctly encapsulated the ecocentric perspective by reiterating that the earth, the biotic world, and the atmosphere form a single organism, through which water flows in its various manifestations, including through the human body.

Water facilitates human existence, and its agency far exceeds the anthropocentric domain. This section explores water's agency and utility: its entity. I use it as a means of progressing research into the aesthetic representation of water. I also consider the extra-human discourse evident in flowing water, and which is central to much of my artwork.

I begin by considering water in its contemporary manifestations.

### **Property Associations**

In manageable quantities, water has come to be regarded as a resource, to be quantified and commodified: regulated, managed, traded and stolen. In the first world, water is complacently disregarded until its availability becomes limited, which then gives it *value*.

In a conurbation, water usually comes from a tap and is chemically treated, free of all possible pathogens or taint, except possibly for taste. Additionally, water may come in plastic bottles for carrying around: labelled, costed, contained.

In an agricultural area, it may be rainwater from a tank, full of life and tasting wonderful and cool, or irrigation water from a river or dam, perhaps a bit muddy or brackish. Chances are that water will be exploited primarily as a commodity and perceived as property, with all the (social, economic, and legal) properties of property, and with no acknowledged entity of its own.

With regard to its commodification, Schwenk (1965, p. 10) asserted that:

A way of thinking that is directed solely to what is profitable cannot perceive the vital coherence of all things in nature. We must today learn from nature how uneconomical and short-sighted our way of thinking has been.

This appraisal of water's commodification neatly summarises the outcome of Escobar's *capitalist nature* (1999, pp. 6-7).

### **Somatic Associations**

On an individual level, water assumes an importance greater than that of a commodity. Healthy human bodies comprise >50% water and require regular and adequate hydration to function effectively. Water flows into us, and out of us, and around us. Human life depends on water, through the agency of water's life-giving characteristics.

Water may mean more to humans than even physiological necessity or its economic value. For much of evolutionary history humanity's precursors were aquatic organisms. Nicole King (2004, p. 313) indicated that the development of multicellular organisms – the progenitors of modern animals, including humans – took place over 600 million years ago. These organisms necessarily evolved in an aquatic environment. Neil Shubin (2009, p. 24) estimated that humanity's terrestrial antecedents emerged from the water 375 million years ago. Theodor Schwenk (1965, p. 80) reiterated that this emergence repeats itself, individually, for every person, in the processes of gestation (development, growth, and life within an aquatic environment) and birth (transition to a terrestrial, air-breathing organism).

It is my contention that humans, through their bio-evolutionary legacy are physiologically preconditioned to respond instinctively and, at times, somatically

to aspects of water's entity, and such responses may be invoked through affective representation.

### **Societal Associations**

Many pre-industrial societies considered aspects of water to be sacred (Schwenk 1965, p. 9), often personifying water's entity through spiritual beings.

Anticipating Ingold's pre-cartographic worldview and Escobar's *capitalist nature*, Schwenk (1965, p. 9) described the greater value attached to water when it had to be physically fetched and carried, and how humanity over time lost its knowledge of the spirituality of water. He recorded how, as late as Romantic times, water was perceived as 'the bearer of the living formative processes'.

In a manner similar to that described by Ingold (2010, pp. 18-20), Schwenk (1965, p. 11) indicated that the way to recover an appreciation of the spiritual nature of water was through a journeying process: from the superficial figurative, or phenomenological, to a deeper, internalised immersion.

Contemporary human society has mastered technologies to capture, store and physically manage water. Science has helped exploit water for generating electricity, irrigating crops, reticulation to cities, and manufacturing the billions of plastic bottles for carrying it around in. Yet science is unable to model, or predict turbulent flows (Ball 2009, pp. 161-2).

Fluid dynamics remains one area where the processes, though well understood, are simply too manifold, their interactions too complex, to be amenable to available computational resolution. Schwenk (1965, p. 78) summarised it as a dynamic feedback, where cause and effect not only interact but change places

simultaneously to produce a 'moving totality' that responds to and, at the same time, modifies its surrounding environment.

### **Water's Wild Agency**

Water also demonstrates wild, uncivilised aspects. In grand and uncontrollable quantities (floods, tsunamis, storms, cyclones) or in its sustained absence (drought), water becomes an agent of fear. Humanity bends its technology to manage and control water, but it remains wild. As well as life giving, its agency can be destructive and unpredictable: damaging to property and threatening to life. Through its wild and, at times, destructive agency, water may also become an agent for regeneration and renewal.

Another aspect of water's expressiveness is its ability to entrain and discharge gases, which produces bubbles in dynamic states (Schwenk 1965, p. 100). This gives definition to flow and an element of visual chaos to turbulent waters.

Water also demonstrates an inherent state of balance: of rhythm and harmony. As Schwenk (*ibid.*, p. 83) explained, the more water can be rhythmically active, the more its inmost nature is expressed. In flowing streams, water assumes any form offered it by the terrain (*ibid.*, p. 80).

So, despite humanity's propensity to commodify and control it, water is well able to express its own agency, often in ways that are independent of the needs or desires of humanity. Water also has complex interrelationships with the life-processes that support the human society that disregards its entity. It is no longer honoured, revered, or even noticed unless it expresses its wildness in

economic terms. Like T. S. Eliot's brown (river) god: '...waiting, watching and waiting' (1944, p. 35).

### **A Transformative Agency**

Water is of key physiological and economic importance to humanity. Pre-industrial societies knew and revered aspects of the water that provided for life and death. They knew its entity and agency: its seasons and moods. This suggests that there is utility in revisiting humanity's ancestral relationships with water.

It further suggests that contemporary society may benefit from moving imaginatively beyond the exploitative limitations of commodification into a new and exciting paradigm: one that seeks to apprehend and, through modern technology, overcome some of the evolutionary limits to human perception with regard to flowing water.

The very act of looking beyond what is presently considered to be the totality of the physical world could offer a transformative revelation. It might be instructive to consider, for example, the breadth of extra-human communications that water exhibits, and to explore a deeper understanding of the way the extra-human world works. With this understanding, our society may well free itself from the blinkering constraints of anthropocentrism and once again take a more-connected role, beyond exploitation, in the dynamic rhythms of the extra-human world.

The practical applications of such an approach are discussed in Chapter 4:

*Evolution / An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water.*

## Photography & Ways of Not-knowing

### **An Alternative Model**

In his 1968 essay, *Understanding a Photograph*, John Berger (2001a, p. 216) contended that photography couldn't be considered as fine art because it has no rarity value. By its nature a photograph is infinitely reproducible. Without value as property, Berger suggested, photography might not support the illusory nature of the capitalist worldview the way traditional fine art did.

Berger (2001b, p. 292) proposed that this differentiation between public and private use supported an alternative model for photography. Instead of the fundamentally linear progression from idea to illustration, Berger's alternative photography would mimic memory by drawing on multiple associations that lead to, and support, a single event: the contextual photograph.

Rather than commodification, which, he maintained, encourages the atrophy of social and political memory, Berger's alternative model would see photography become part of social and political memory. He suggested constructing context for a photograph through words, other photographs, or by its place in a photographic narrative. This, he felt, would place the photographic image within a temporal narrative: the foundation of an historic time, relevant for social memory and social action. He envisaged a multi-layered system in which such images might be perceived as 'simultaneously personal, political, economic, thematic, everyday and historic' (ibid., p. 293). This echoes Morphy's, Ingold's, and Escobar's multiple perspective conceptions, outlined in *Alternative Worldviews*, earlier in this chapter. In response to these (and other, similar) provocations, I have structured one of my photographic narratives, *A Huon Dialogue: Re-*

*presentations of a Truncated River*, as a multi-layered performative artwork (see Chapter 5: *Revelation / A Performative Work*). As well, my exhibited photographic prints are arranged in contextual groups that address key aspects of the research (see Chapter 5: *Revelation / The Photographic Prints*).

## **On Not-knowing**

Emma Cocker (2013, pp. 126-7) spoke of uncertainty, of not knowing, as being the wellspring of creativity. In unpacking the experience, she explored three conceptual modes of not knowing.

The first was its rational provocation for learning: driving the cognitive state from ignorance to understanding. This is the basis for our modern knowledge system and is the paradigm within which, for example, both capitalism and art history operate. The unknown is actively sought out and transformed into knowledge. Alternatively, it is accounted for as externality: contained within an error band, and bound within an accepted probability function, where it may be ignored for as long as is practicable.

The second mode utilises not knowing in speculative or imaginative ways, with undefined outcomes. It is a valued, sometimes daunting, part of the act of making: an act of faith and trust, rather than of fearful limitation.

The third mode, which builds on the second, sees not knowing as 'a field of desirable indeterminacy' involving the aspiration to maintain aspects of not knowing. In an artistic practice, this mode might lead to the incorporation of unknowable elements within the material realisation of the artwork.

As an artist, it is valuable to explore how these theoretical considerations parallel the processes I employ in my practice.

The image shown in Figure 2.2, *Untitled* (150501373), below, is a work still in the making. Being a digital photograph it is of indeterminate size: a latency resolved only when it is printed and, even then, not unalterably fixed. The same applies to its replication. These are tangible unknowns.

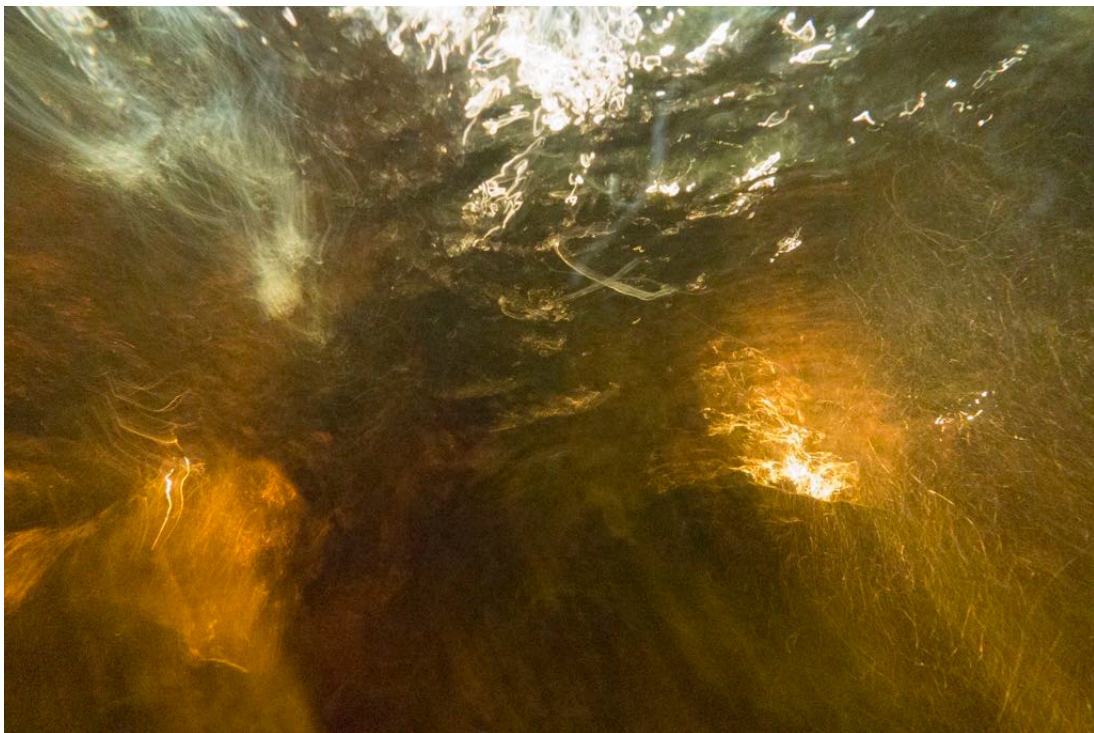


Figure 2.2: *Untitled* (150501373): In the littoral reaches of Condominium Creek, May 2015.

In sensual terms, the image represents an environment defined by patches of colour and light. Some of its forms suggest movement and power, others solidity, fixedness. Shadows and the angularity of light create a feeling of tension, of transition: of liminal energy. Without further context, the image swirls with ambiguity. These are the parameters of a private photograph, in John Berger's terms. Perhaps the articulation of a narrative context will, likewise, provide it with a place within social and political memory.



This photograph was taken below the surface of Condominium Creek, a small, stream in Tasmania's southwest. In my own conception, this image aims to take a multi-layered approach to depicting the energies and visual artefacts extant in flowing water. It is not an abstraction: no elements have been added or subtracted. The visual cues of colour and light, energy and time remain as captured. It actively incorporates not knowing in its visual ambiguity.

Not knowing was also applied to the image's composition. This image was taken without reference to the viewfinder: it was shot blind, so to speak (see Chapter 4: *Evolution / Representation / Subsurface Explorations*).

As well as being visually ambiguous, the image depicts the specular tracings of air bubbles, which help delineate the turbulent energies present. These tracings contain information - a form of aquatic calligraphy - that has relevance to in-stream biota. Like birdcalls in the forest, fundamentally uninterpretable, non-human information is nevertheless of sensual human interest. This unknowability is a cognitive provocation that may engender a rethinking of perceptions of flowing water.

This image uses water as a metaphor for the wild. By overtly including aspects of ambiguity and unknowability, it is my hope that percipients may be encouraged to consider humanity's inseparability from wildness. They may review their individual relationships with the known and the not known environment: one that provides for both humanity and the extra-human. In so doing, it is possible that presently existing dysfunctional paradigms, such as capitalism and its anthropocentric justifications, might be broadened and reconstituted for the benefit of the entire planet and its extra-human entities.

This would result in a more humane worldview (though perhaps a no less illusory one), from which perspective it may be profitable to revisit John Berger's assertion about photography and fine art.

## 3 Praxis

### Introduction

This chapter extends the process of locating my project within the theory and practice of landscape photography. It builds on the conceptual groundwork of Chapter 2: *Theoria* to explore key contextual foundations for my practice-based photographic research. It discusses examples of artistic explorations related to the wildness and artefact theme of my project.

*Origins* discusses the development of landscape and wilderness photography: their historic contexts and underlying conventions. Through selected examples, I examine how photographers used their medium, and timely technological advances, to both drive, and meet, the expectations of their contemporary audiences. From this discussion, I trace two photographic lineages: environmental advocacy and wilderness deconstruction.

*Environmental Advocacy* examines the growth of wilderness photography in the service of wild place protection in the face of anthropogenic development.

*Wilderness Deconstructed* follows the development of landscape photography that references humanity's treatment of the artificially disturbed environment.

Both discourses produced prominent proponents and both contribute to an interwoven contextual foundation for my project.

*Wilderness and Wildness* offers a brief discussion on the connotations and shortcomings of the term *wilderness* in a photographic context. I discuss the rationale behind my move towards representing *wildness*, and the connotations of commodification and human absence in the context of my work.

*Recent Works* complements the above discussions through examples of exhibited works from my previous practice-based research.

## Origins

Landscape photography has its roots in 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape painting and the aesthetics of the Picturesque, via a 'rationally articulated representation of graduated spatial recession', with nature represented as gentle, and in mutually

beneficial harmony with humanity (Stephenson 2005, pp. 1-2). Photography that derived its imagery from wild places emerged around the early 1860s (Haynes 2006, p. 151) at much the same time as the notion of wilderness was being codified in legal and political terms (see Chapter 2: *Theoria / Derivations of Wilderness*). Technological advances permitted a (relatively) portable set of equipment to be carried into the field (Haygarth 2008, p. 33).

Carleton Watkins' 1861 Yosemite photographs and Morton Allport's 1863 Lake St Clair stereographs are early examples of American and Tasmanian landscape photography, respectively (DeLuca & Demo 2000, pp. 241-2; Haynes 2006, p. 154). Watkins transported a Mammoth camera, capable of exposing 18 x 22 inch (approx. 46 x 56 cm) glass plates, as well as a stereoscopic camera into Yosemite Valley, California to capture his seminal images (Hambourg 1999, p. 10). Both Watkins' and Allport's imagery broke new ground in representing wild places.

### **The Human Dimension**

Martin Berger (2003, p. 20) indicated that Watkins tended to shoot his large Yosemite images without evidence of a human presence, apparently to distinguish his work from those of his competitors. When he did include people, they provided scale, and thus veracity, to his photographs (Nickel 1999, p. 61).

On the other hand, many of Watkins' stereographic images featured human figures, horses, and buildings (Carletonwatkins.org 2017). Berger (2003, pp. 13-14) pointed out that such imagery served to celebrate the transformation of the land from wilderness to civilisation.

In a Tasmanian context, Nic Haygarth (2008, pp. 53-54) analysed the historical depiction of people in Tasmanian landscape photography, and the progression of this practice over time. He found that it varied according to fashion and available technology, demonstrating the power of contemporary attitudes and commercial demand in defining wilderness imagery.

### Compositional Adjustment

Allport's stereographs of Tasmania's Lake St Clair region show a landscape on a more human scale than that of Watkins' Yosemite. Figure 3.1 illustrates one of these images, *Mount Ida (Lake St Clair)*.



Figure 3.1: Morton Allport (b. England, 1830-1878), *Mount Ida (Lake St Clair)*, 1863, two photographic prints (b&w stereograph) each 7.3 x 7.3cm, Allport Library, Hobart<sup>3</sup>.

Anne-Marie Willis (cited in Bonyhady 2000, p. 202) indicated that this image was an excellent example of the stereographic technique, with well-separated

<sup>3</sup> < <https://stors.tas.gov.au/AUTA001126254101> > image No. 12 (accessed 26 February 2017), Reproduced in accordance with the site's terms of use for research.

compositional elements. A figure in a small boat is central in the middle distance.

Allport's image demonstrates the power of a relatively simple composition and the value of a different mode of representation: that of stereoscopic imagery.

Such images were destined for a popular market (Haynes 2006, p. 154).

The foreground Pandani acts as a key visual anchor for the stereo effect, although it seems out of place within the lake's littoral and was probably placed there. The manipulation of compositional content was, apparently, an accepted feature of landscape photography at the time (Bonyhady 2000, pp. 200-1).

Similar manipulation is evident in early images from the Yosemite Valley. Berger (2003, pp. 4-5, 20) cited Watkins' 1865-6 photograph, *The Yosemite Valley from the Best General View*, as an exemplar of landscape imagery devoid of any human sign, yet a foreground conifer had most of its branches obviously lopped, presumably to improve the view.

Such adjustments reflected the Picturesque and painterly origins of the genre, as well as the expectations of its contemporary consumers.

### **The Wilderness Discourse**

A key point of both Watkins' and Allport's photography, and that of their contemporaries, is the multitude of discourses that have drawn particular meanings from the work. DeLuca & Demo (2000, pp. 242-5, 253) located Watkins' Yosemite images in aesthetic, commercial, scientific and political domains. For example, Watkins' large format images were instrumental in securing Yosemite as the world's first wilderness area in 1864, based on their

scientific veracity and the political need of the time. As DeLuca & Demo (ibid., pp. 251, 256) reconstruct it:

At a time when the ongoing Civil War was read as a sign of God's disfavor [sic], Americans, through Watkins' pictorial evidence, embraced Yosemite as a manifestation of God's continuing favor.

This redemptive polemic is rendered somewhat hollow by their observation that the 'Edenic' Yosemite Valley had been forcibly cleared of its indigenous population some decade beforehand.

Berger (2003, pp. 13-4) indicated that there was no ideological inconsistency in Watkins' work, which featured iconic wilderness imagery and also illustrated industrial and other human activities. These were often advertised, displayed and sold alongside each other. Such juxtaposition was concordant with the societal expectations of the time.

A similar mesh of apparently competing motivations could be applied to Allport's images. Their aesthetic values are appropriately Picturesque. Their commercial utility is denoted by the use of stereography, which was then highly fashionable (DeLuca & Demo 2000, pp. 245-6). As some of the earliest landscape photographs from the Tasmanian region, their publication provided both scientific veracity and the political reassurance that even the wild, unknown land could be turned to (European) human benefit.

Berger (2003, p. 14) commented on the apparent environmental complacency of late 19<sup>th</sup> century American sensibilities, noting that exploitative activities such as industrialisation or resource extraction were countenanced provided they did not disturb 'those elements of the landscape that gave European-Americans visual confirmation of their cultural values'. DeLuca & Demo (2000, p. 245) observed



that Watkins created two legacies: the first in establishing landscape photography, and the second as a recorder of industrial progress. These points prompted a bifurcation in my discussion.

The developing canon of wilderness photography grew to be closely associated with environmental advocacy (see below), while the realist photography of human modified landscapes acted, in many ways, to deconstruct the wilderness paradigm (see *Wilderness Deconstructed* (p. 57)). This latter approach reflects Najman's interpretation that, in ancient Judaic texts, wilderness can also be construed as '*the city* [his emphasis] after destruction' (2006, p. 103).

## Environmental Advocacy

If for no other reason than their impact on contemporary audiences, both Allport's and Watkins' imagery could be construed as early examples of wilderness photography. In an Australian context, Haynes (2006, pp. 315-6) suggested that wilderness photography came to define the very wilderness it purported to represent. Similarly, DeLuca & Demo (2000, p. 244) noted that Watkins' images did not simply represent Yosemite, but created its actuality as an enduring way of viewing the Western (American) landscape.

The crucial role of Watkins' imagery in the creation of Yosemite as the world's first wilderness area effectively established environmentalism in America (*ibid.*, pp. 241-2). Several years later, John Muir's writings, which drew heavily on his interpretations of Watkins' imagery, were instrumental in the establishment of Yosemite National Park (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, pp. 550-1) and the founding of the Sierra Club.

Amid the vast neural network of history there are two nodal points that are key to this discussion: one in California and the other in Tasmania. Both involved the damming and impoundment of areas within legislated National Parks for infrastructure projects, and both galvanised intense community opposition. The first was the Hetch Hetchy Project, which, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, flooded the eponymous valley in Yosemite National Park to provide water and hydroelectricity for San Francisco. The second was the flooding of Lake Pedder, in Tasmania's South-West National Park, in the early 1970s, to substantially augment the state's hydroelectric capacity.

Both protests failed: the infrastructure was built; the land was flooded. The legacies of those failures, however, produced significant changes in photographic approaches to landscape, some of which were subsequently enlisted into the cause of wilderness conservation, or environmental advocacy.

The catalysing effect of the Hetch Hetchy Project brought the Sierra Club to national prominence. John Williams (1921, p. 150) described it succinctly:

If there were no Yosemite, Hetch Hetchy would doubtless be the most celebrated Valley in America.

## **Ansel Adams**

Ansel Adams is famed for his technically brilliant, monochrome wilderness imagery. He joined the Sierra Club in 1919, at the height of the Hetch Hetchy campaign, and later became a board member. By that stage he was acknowledged as 'both the artist of the Sierra Nevada and the defender of Yosemite' (Turnage 1999).

Adams was also developing the more realist style of photographic modernism for which he is famous: one that is characterised by finely detailed, high contrast imagery utilising the broadest possible depth of field (Flew 2013, p. 28; Worden 2013, p. 69). And, while he wrote about his subject as expressively as he photographed it, Adams frequently included notes on the technical aspects of both his images and the practice of landscape photography. His classic pictorial book, *Yosemite Valley* (1967) is an example of this approach.

The sheer emotive power of Adams' imagery, potent to this day, provided an authoritative source of inspiration for my project.

### **Eliot Porter**

In the second half of the twentieth century colour images of wild places became relatively commonplace. Eliot Porter was one of the foremost proponents of grand colour landscapes, most notably of the American southwest. Yet it was a decidedly different approach - a book of small-scale nature scenes, which emphasised the mysteries of wildness rather than the grandness of wilderness - that brought his work to international prominence. *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* was published by the Sierra Club in 1962. It was set in the woodlands and wetlands of the northeast of the USA (Porter 1962, p. 7), and featured selected quotes from Henry David Thoreau. Finis Dunaway (2005, p. 80) described the book's images as:

fragments of nature; ... minute details, studying the relationships between organisms within nature.

Porter's imagery was so compelling that Rebecca Solnit (2001, p. 6) attributed to it the shaping of popular imagination. She contended that such work encouraged

his viewers to move beyond their conditioned viewpoints and to become aware of nature's 'subtle and intricate interrelationships'.

In terms of my practice, the key points are Porter's focus on small details rather than grand landscapes, the dynamic interrelationships evident in wild areas, and his successful use of photography to alter the perceptions of his audience.

### Olegas Truchanas

In Tasmania, the early 1970s campaign to save Lake Pedder from inundation resulted in some iconic imagery of the original lake. Olegas Truchanas produced a number of audio-visual presentations for public protest meetings. The image shown in Figure 3.2 is from one such set.



Figure 3.2: Olegas Truchanas (Lithuanian-Australian 1923-1972), *Two children running from the centre of the beach into the warm shallows of Lake Pedder, Tasmania, 1972*, 35 mm transparency, National Library of Australia<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn3885846-s20>> (accessed 3 March 2017). Part of Olegas Truchanas Lake Pedder audio-visual collection, Tasmania [picture] slides between 1968-1971, digital reproductions, 2007. Reproduced in accordance with the site's terms of use for research.

Within that audio-visual context, this image is one of twelve that pictured human activities at the lake. Two children splash through the mirror-like surface of the lake. Behind them, the Frankland Range is half shadowed by cloud. The distant beach line bisects the composition, with the figures' action approaching the photograph's centre. The image expresses the wonder of being at this place at that time. As an exemplar of humanity's inseparability from the wild, it is brilliantly complete.

Truchanas' images were pivotal to my project, as it was through his audio-visual productions that I became actively aware of the Lake Pedder controversy. His images encouraged me to visit the lake prior to its inundation, to see the original for myself.

### **Peter Dombrovskis**

Following Truchanas' death in 1972, his protégé, Peter Dombrovskis, brought his own photographic voice to the cause of wilderness advocacy (Haynes 2006, p. 318). He undertook extended solo trips into the Tasmanian bush, carrying a large format view camera and other necessary equipment. Dombrovskis (1995, p. 123) reported:

My most productive days are when I move through the landscape with an attitude of acceptance, leaving myself open to all possibilities.

His finely crafted and highly detailed images of the Tasmanian southwest became synonymous with wilderness photography in the state (Haynes 2006, p. 319). One of his images, *Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, South West Tasmania* (Figure 3.3) was instrumental in garnering support for the successful opposition to further damming in the Gordon River in the early 1980s.



Figure 3.3: Peter Dombrovskis (Australian 1945-96), *Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, South West Tasmania*, 1983, poster 61 x 75cm, National Library of Australia<sup>5</sup>.

It remains one of the most recognisable images of the Tasmanian wilderness.

Dombrovskis' work portrays the depth of his feelings for the southwest landscape: his intimacy and vulnerability. These factors allied with his photographic proficiency provided a valuable reference point for my practice.

## Susan Derges

A significant part of my research involves exploring the subsurface environment of the catchments' waterways. The images in Susan Derges' book, *Liquid Form 1985-99*, speak of the pure form of flowing water. Derges captured patterns expressing dynamic fluvial interactions as the primary subject of her representation. The images are photograms of the River Taw, made by

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<sup>5</sup> <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-135595326/view>> (accessed 3 March 2017) Reproduced in accordance with the site's terms of use for research.



immersing large sheets of photographic paper just below the water's surface at night. The paper was exposed using background light followed by short flashes of bright light. The cameraless photogram process allowed a less-mediated rendering of the landscape: the resultant trace is, in some ways, a more direct form of representation. Figure 3.4 shows two of the images from Derges' book.



*River Taw* 8 April 1997



*River Taw* 17 April 1997

Figure 3.4: Susan Derges (English, b. 1955), *River Taw 8 April 1997* and *River Taw 17 April 1997*, (Derges, 1999, p. 81).

Philip Ball (2009, p. 18) commented on the similarities between Derges' images and drawings of water by Leonardo da Vinci. He suggested that, like da Vinci's work, the images could be perceived as both scientific records and artworks.

Derges' images are relevant to my project because they illustrate part of the extra-human communications system of the river: that part that sculpts the water's surface in response to the dynamic, three-dimensional turbulence below.

### **Sebastião Salgado**

In terms of photographic practitioners working in the field of environmental advocacy, the comprehensive body of work presented by Sebastião Salgado in his 2013 book, *Genesis*, is iconic. Here is a contemporary body of work that explores wild landscapes from the tropics to the poles, capturing the dramatic wildness of mountains, forests, climatic extremes, and human communities.

In *Genesis*, Salgado presented a detailed view of an inclusive and expansive natural world, of which the human participants form an intrinsic part. His archetypal monochrome images demonstrably subvert the civilisation-wilderness duality often associated with wild landscape imagery. His work showcases both human and non-human Otherness in ways that command attention while raising challenging questions. Such goals are highly pertinent to my project which is intimately engaged in researching human perceptions of, and interactions with, wild Otherness.

The above examples indicate the relevance and importance of landscape photography's environmental advocacy in informing key aspects of my practice.



## Wilderness Deconstructed

The second thread in this discussion considers landscapes in which human activities have visibly altered the environment. It begins with an example that illustrates the divergent perspectives of the two threads (*environmental advocacy* and *wilderness deconstructed*) in a coincidence of place: Highway 285 in New Mexico.

### U.S. 285 (Ansel Adams and Robert Frank)

In 1941, Ansel Adams captured one of his more-famous scenes, *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*. It portrays the last rays of a setting sun spotlighting a cemetery's white crosses. The village of Hernandez is backgrounded by snowy mountains cloaked by white clouds. Above it all, Adams' archetypal waxing gibbous moon is set in a black sky<sup>6</sup>. The location is given as Highway 285, New Mexico (anseladams.com).

Some fourteen years later, Robert Frank captured one of his iconic images, *U.S. 285 New Mexico*, which Jack Kerouac, in his introductory essay to Frank's *The Americans* (1978, p. 5), described as:

Long shot of night road arrowing forlorn into immensities and flat of impossible-to-believe America in New Mexico under the prisoner's moon.

Although Adams' and Frank's images were taken from different locations on that road, they offer an interesting comparison.

Adams' characteristic sharpness, the dramatic lighting and the distant, supervisory moon speak of the edge of wilderness: a boundary denoted by the

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<sup>6</sup> See anseladams.com < <http://anseladams.com/ansel-adams-anecdotes/> > (accessed 2 March 2017) for a discussion of the scene and the technical details of Adams' photograph.

illuminated grave markers. It is a boundary that impedes: that arrests the visual narrative at the village buildings, before it leaps across in search of the wildness beyond. Like his other images of full moons set against wild landscapes, Adams' use of a deep yellow filter ([anseladams.com](http://anseladams.com)) created the dark sky so necessary to the drama of his image and its visual interpretation. This photographic artefact closely associates the view over Hernandez with the emotional potency of his Yosemite images.

Frank's equally dramatic image is softer-focussed and grainy. It portrays a brightly lit, arrow-straight road, empty to the horizon but for one distant car. It is another image in which the photographer invokes the impression of a night sky. Nothing but blackness exists to either side of the roadway. The painted centreline draws the eye towards the distant horizon and its crepuscular glow. Frank has visually imbued the scene with the emotional desolation of the open road: an automobile exile. Here, there is no barrier, no perceptual hesitation. Here, the wilderness is entirely human-created.

These two images reflect narratives that apply to my project. The impoundments are set within a World Heritage Wilderness Area, invoking a tendency toward environmental advocacy. Yet they are extensive artefacts of hydro-industrial development, foreshadowing a deconstructed wilderness.

The U.S. 285 images illustrate the potential for imaginative interplay between their seemingly divergent perspectives.

## New Topographics

Frank's theme of isolation within an anthropogenic wilderness was extended by the 1975 exhibition, *New Topographics*. Photographers Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, and Joe Deal presented imagery that actively embraced aspects of human created desolation, and its implied isolation. Their landscapes illustrated many human artefacts, though rarely any people, as they interrogated the legacies of myth and fact that their photographic predecessors, including Watkins, had bequeathed them (Highnam 1981, p. 3).

Paul Highnam (ibid., p. 6) noted that Robert Adams' photographs juxtaposed the 'remorseless appropriation of the land' with areas of wildness. Highnam concluded that Robert Adams' work transcended the limitations implicit in contemporary definitions of wilderness. In so doing, Adams and the other protagonists of *New Topographics* were emphatically reconnecting human artefacts to the natural world. Here were places that bore the imprints of human activity overlying, and being overlaid by, prevailing natural processes.

Such interactions form a fundamental premise of my project: how the hydro-industrial artefacts interact with, and are influenced by, the wild processes that enfold them.

## Narelle Autio

Moving beyond terrestrial landscapes, my project is also concerned with wild processes beneath the water's surface. Australian photographer, Narelle Autio's *Water Hole* series evoked the sub-surface mystery of an outback waterhole.

Figure 3.5 shows one of her powerful images from this series.

A swimmer disrupts the still water environment of algal growth and silent decay: a metaphoric reminder of both the impact and transience of human activity. Background rays of sunlight add image depth. The image speaks of the water's coolness and the swimmer's buoyancy: the way hands and feet become stabilisers, elements of the transformation from terrestrial to aquatic being. I imagine the delight of such an experience on a hot day.



Figure 3.5: Narelle Autio (Australian, b. 1969), *untitled #10 (Water Hole)*, 2013, type C print, 82 x 120 cm. [http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/autio/index.php?obj\\_id=series&nav=11](http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/autio/index.php?obj_id=series&nav=11) (accessed 29 December 2016).

On the other hand, the image also creates an aura of drama and lurking menace in the dark vignetting of the enclosing pool. Bits of disturbed algae float throughout the water column. The suspended, central figure establishes an ambiguity that is less than playful. The low viewing angle, potentially that of a predator, and the figure's headlessness, suggest the potential for an altogether more frightening experience.

Autio reiterates the real danger, expressed on local warning signs, of these desert waterholes and their latent threat.

Both mystery and promise lie beneath the surface of these waters. A dark place of conflict, of light and dark and life and death, of questions unanswered<sup>7</sup>.

Autio's waterhole images, with their mystery and implicit menace, offer useful reference material for my project. The Tasmanian subsurface environment, while devoid of human predators, is equally mysterious and challenging.

## **Edward Burtynsky**

By utilising an aerial perspective that eliminated the horizon, limited the field of view, and drew attention to patterns both natural and anthropogenic, Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, offered a different perspective on how the surface of the planet was represented. He photographed landscapes transformed by industry: detailed, often large in scale, these images highlighted the modern human dilemma of material desire contrasted with its visible environmental cost (Burtynsky 2014). Figure 3.7 shows Burtynsky's photograph of the Colorado River delta, which illustrates the yearning of the Sea of Cortez for the non-existent discharge from the river.

Sandra Postel and Jason Morrison (1998, pp. 120-4) reported that water extraction upstream in the United States has caused the riverbed south of the Mexican border to be dry since the early 1960s. Despite international agreements, this extraction leaves little for the Mexican communities

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<sup>7</sup> Narelle Autio, text accompanying the images from Water hole 2013, <<https://www.agencevu.com/stories/index.php?id=1470&p=122>> (accessed 29 December 2016).

downstream (a human Other), and none for the river's own ecological functions (a wild Other).

Burtynsky's representation of these consequences is both affective and sobering. The pattern illustrated in Figure 3.6 is dendritic: a result of tidal cycling acting on the deposition bed at the river's mouth. On the surface, the pattern is beautifully complex and appealing. It is the realisation of what this view should be like that raises questions of perception and its derived meaning.



Figure 3.6: Edward Burtynsky (Canadian, b. 1955), *Colorado River Delta #2, near San Felipe, Baja, Mexico*, 2011 (Burtynsky 2013, p. 35).

This image reflects a number of interactions between artefacts of human actions and water's wild nature that are directly relevant to my project.



## Martin Walch

Tasmanian photographer, Martin Walch, used imagery of the environmental degradation of the Mt Lyell copper mine at Queenstown, on Tasmania's west coast, to express the notion that wilderness necessarily includes what remains after humans leave a landscape (Haynes 2006, pp. 334-5). Walch's Mt Lyell imagery highlighted the unspoken subtext of Tasmania's 'clean, green' branding: the unremediated consequences of historic mining activities on the state's west coast. Figure 3.7 shows one of his images of the Comstock Mine at Mt Lyell.



Figure 3.7: Martin Walch (Australian), *Comstock Mine, Mt Lyell, Tasmania*, 2000, 35mm transparency from stereoscopic pair<sup>8</sup>.

Haynes (2006, p. 335) remarked on this image's superficial similarity to Dombrovskis' *Rock Island Bend* (see Figure 3.3). To me it reflects the casual environmental disregard expressed in some of the *New Topographics* imagery: a wilderness of humanity's own creation. It represents an environment that,

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<sup>8</sup> <<http://www.australianphotographers.org/artists/martin-walch/photos>> (accessed 3 March 2017). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

through the toxicity of acid mine drainage, is inimical to biotic (including human) life, thus supporting the modern definition of wilderness, at least in terms of the absence of a human presence.

Walch's image is an expression of the way he responded to that experience at that time. Its subject matter is challenging and uncomfortable. It both highlights, and actively challenges, the complacent, often vicarious, consumption of wilderness photography (see Walch 2005, p. 6).

### David Stephenson

David Stephenson used multi-panel photographic mosaics to represent the fragmentation of wild landscapes in the 1980s, especially those associated with the development of hydroelectric projects (Haynes 2006, p. 326). Anne Marsh (2010, p. 272) indicated that much of Stephenson's work is steeped in the tradition of the Sublime and 'the related notion of the redemptive power of nature'. This perspective is apparent in his book *Skeletons*, where he presented images from a number of Tasmanian hydroelectric impoundments. Figures 3.8 & 3.9 show two of his Lake Gordon photographs (Stephenson, 2003, pp. 9-10).

Many of his images, such as Figure 3.8, *Drowned No. 194 (Lake Gordon, Tasmania)*, highlighted the devastation of impoundment. In this image cut stumps and felled logs are presented in negative form, emphasising the abjectness of the scene. A dark mid-line, probably marking the impoundment's shoreline, bisects the image horizontally. A torpid pool leads the eye through this desolation towards the still-forested horizon. The sky is leaden overcast. Other images, such as Figure 3.9: *Drowned No. 16 (Lake Gordon, Tasmania)*, contrasted this starkness with more atmospheric imagery.





Figure 3.8: David Stephenson (American-Australian b. 1955), *Drowned No. 194 (Lake Gordon, Tasmania)*, 2002, toned gelatin silver prints, 65 x 91 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



Figure 3.9: David Stephenson, *Drowned No. 16 (Lake Gordon, Tasmania)*, 2002, toned gelatin silver prints, 65 x 91 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Here, drowned tree skeletons, signifiers of destruction, formed harmonising compositional elements, threading through the bisecting horizon to link water and sky. The slightly rippled water surface reflects the dead trees and low, misty clouds soften the hills behind.

The accompanying essay by Greg French underlined this sense of ambiguity presenting intriguing insights into deeper issues of humanity's relationship to a degraded environment (Stephenson 2003, pp. 21-3).

French's words and Stephenson's photographs persuasively represent the destruction produced by inundation. They also subtly point to the inherent wild processes that allow the narrative to move beyond the visual desolation and towards the next stage in the cycle of death and life, which is regeneration.

Apart from their direct historic relevance, Stephenson's images provide a useful background to my project's further exploration of the consequences of impoundment and the regenerative processes that have since become evident.

## Wilderness and Wildness

In chapter 2, *Theoria / A Word (or Two) about Wilderness*, I discussed the conceptual issues related to the Western notion of wilderness. I concluded that *wilderness* was a term too universally misused to be useful. I chose to use the term *wildness* as a descriptor for wild places or processes. This section continues my analysis of the wilderness conundrum in contemporary landscape photography and describes my photographic responses.

In *Beautiful Lies: Photography and Wilderness*, David Stephenson (2005, p. 5)

outlined a suite of objections to prevailing trends in wilderness photography, including:

- an absence of human figures or presence (signifying a civilisation-wilderness duality, and denying the actuality of indigenous occupation);
- a derivative and apparently rigid adherence to Picturesque representational conventions (which act to deny the diversity of nature and its processes); and
- the objectification of wild areas produced through such imagery (which compounds the misconceptions listed above and acts to define wilderness for much of society; its commodified representation facilitating gratuitous consumption).

Lucy Lippard (1998, pp. 60-1) recommended reconsidering photography's role in interpreting the symbolic language of landscape imagery. She cited aestheticisation as the primary obstacle to communicating the being of a landscape. Similarly, Richard Flanagan (1991, p. 7) pinpointed the objectification of wilderness as a key danger for artists working in this field.

A photograph of a myrtle tree, like a photograph of a naked woman, becomes an object of desire that has no context outside that of fantasy. The consequence of wilderness is the pornography of nature.

Martin Walch (2005, pp. 1-5) provided a comprehensive review of both the term *eco-porn* and the various marketing pressures that drive its usage in Tasmania. He commented on the increasing alienation of the urbanised consumer from the natural world, of which the growth in consumption of wilderness images is symptomatic. Walch (2005, p. 6) concluded that eco-porn (in its exploitative sense) challenges artists to engender new ways of seeing and naming, in order to extend perceptions toward a deeper emotional engagement with the natural world.

## Approaching Wildness

My project concentrates on aspects of water: its presence, absence, and its wildness. It contributes to discourse on wild landscape imagery by:

- representing hydro-industrial landscapes set within an otherwise wild area;
- expressing the outcomes of anthropogenic actions and their interactions with wild processes in those landscapes, emphasising cycles of growth, decay, and regeneration; and
- representing the wild environment of flowing water using subsurface imagery that illustrates, among other things, the water's dynamic extra-human communications and information processes.

My project is explicitly associated with the hydro-industrial artefacts of the region, including those of the impoundments. As well, many of the streams that I have accessed were affected by human activity, from logging to road building. Even the weather is artificially impacted to some degree. And, over all of these, the prevailing processes of wildness continue to act.

## No Apparent Human Presence

There are distinct symbolic reasons for not including people in imagery of wild places. Plumwood (1998, p. 682) spoke of solo travelling in the wilderness as a means of experiencing the *presence of nature* (her emphasis) and how human company may obscure that presence.

A key characteristic of my fieldwork was a pursuit of solitude. My imagery reflects that solitude. Haygarth (2008, p. 53) considered that every viewer of (unpeopled) wild area photography is intrinsically asked to imagine solitude by experiencing it through the photographer's. My aim is to represent the consequences of anthropogenic actions, and their interactions with endemic wild

processes. To include human figures would direct a percipient's attention to the narrative implied by their presence.

Although experiencing solitude is quite different from denying all human presence, my approach runs the risk of appearing to accede to the misconception that indigenous peoples were not part of the wild environment. Human occupation of the Tasmanian southwest extends back at least 35,000 years (Parks and Wildlife Service 1999, p. 24). Further, the current management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (which surrounds the impoundments under study) actively acknowledges both Pleistocene and Holocene indigenous occupation of the area as key components of its cultural heritage (DPIPWE 2016, pp. 38-43). It also recognises a synthesis between the Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural landscape and (Western) concepts of wilderness (ibid., p. 103).

If it needs to be fitted into any historic context, the absence of a human presence in my imagery reflects that of *New Topographics* and Martin Walch: mine are landscapes that represent the relics - the detritus and the consequences - of human activity.

## Recent Works

My recent works have led toward this project by exploring visual linkages between human artefacts and wildness.

### Cataclysm III

*Cataclysm III: Picturing the Liminal States of Lake Gordon, Tasmania* (part of a group (Honours) exhibition, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 16-25 November 2012) utilised water-focused landscape imagery to document aspects of the changes that were occurring during 2011-12 as the water level in the Gordon Impoundment rose to its third major peak in forty years. Figure 3.11 shows one of the works exhibited.



Figure 3.10: *Cataclysm (d)* 2012, (one of five images in this series). Pigment inks on Centurion Metallic Pearl archival paper, 750 x 1000 mm.

My research demonstrated that the industrial artefact of the Gordon Impoundment also exhibited characteristics of wildness, having regenerated

extensive areas of natural vegetation within the soon to be inundated littoral. It was during this work that I first began experimenting with subsurface imagery as a means of exploring the fate of the drowned vegetation.

That project questioned the boundaries between the natural and the artificial. It led directly to this present, more-focussed interrogation of the interactions between wild processes and hydro-industrial artefacts.

## A Threaded Summary

Through much of this chapter I have pursued two photographic threads, environmental advocacy and wilderness deconstruction, to elucidate apparently divergent approaches to the subject of wild places.

Behind their superficially polarised appearances, they are emphatically interwoven. Few of the photographers whose approaches I have sketched follow my simplistic categorisation totally. Salgado's *Genesis* photographs of wild places and peoples follow years of recording the depredations of humans on each other and on the planet (Salgado 2013, pp. 5-7). Burtynsky reported that, in the production of *Water*, he photographed landscapes of pristine wilderness for the first time in over thirty years (Burtynsky 2013, p. 9).

Proponents of *Environmental Advocacy* intrinsically espoused an ecocentric perspective: overtly wild places are vital to the sanity of humanity and its survival on this planet; therefore, a broad discourse of responsible sustainability was developed for such special places. Significant effort and resources were expended in efforts to protect them. Yet the very success of this approach, its inherent appeal and its focus on an iconic location, has led to commodification

and codification, as well as to accusations of elitism and racism (see, e.g., De Luca and Demo 2001, p. 541). Such responses are, by their nature, anthropocentric.

*Wilderness Deconstruction* took a more realist, and necessarily anthropocentric viewpoint: humans responded to anthropogenic actions that affected them. However, the metanarrative could be construed as ecocentric: remedial actions beneficial for humanity should also produce results beneficial for the broader environment.

*Wildness and Wilderness* and *Recent Works* wove a conceptual path through these various conundrums, to offer the project's fundamental viewpoint. It is one that considers anthropogenic artefacts, associated wild processes, and their interactions as inseparable components of a complex, human-modified planetary system that is fundamentally human-indifferent. These are tenets of an ecocentric perspective. A nested subset of this system is responsive to a primarily anthropocentric perspective for certain human purposes that are, nevertheless, ultimately referent to, and dependent on, the broader system.

This approach utilises the wisdom and experiences of both threads, while, hopefully, negotiating their pitfalls.



## 4 Evolution

### Introduction

This chapter plots the evolution of the project in terms of the key practices adopted, the locations visited, and the representational techniques used. It also discusses the theoretical and contextual considerations that evolved with the imagery.

The first section, *Representation*, describes the techniques I used to produce the outcomes of the project. Their development and utility is discussed, as are some of those explorations that were less successful at meeting the project's objectives.

*Representation* examines my approach to achieving artworks that authentically embody the salient aspects of my thesis. It also discusses some of the considerations I used to prepare images.

*Places* introduces the field sites within the Pedder and Gordon Impoundments, their catchment streams, and associated reference waters that were visited and photographed. It describes the anthropogenic factors that have influenced these locations.

*An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water* discusses the aspects of wildness that are evident in flowing water. It considers the utility of subsurface imagery and how different types of images may advance both anthropocentric and ecocentric discourses.

## Representation

At the commencement of the project, I had a number of possible photographic techniques from which to choose. These ranged from still imagery in colour or monochrome, to video. I also recorded ambient sounds, both above and below the water's surface.

I identified three key representational approaches.

Firstly, I needed to represent the impoundments as they are today, after more than forty years of existence. This meant taking a fresh look at the consequences of impoundment in the light of the area's wild processes, which have overlaid the anthropogenic ones. The impoundments are not the same water bodies that were

originally created: time and weather have seen to that. I wanted to investigate what had changed, and explore affective ways to represent those changes.

Secondly, I chose to represent my landscapes in ways that would emphasise both artificial and wild subjects, and their interactions. This approach was designed to make it obvious that the images pictured environments that were, in some way, human-modified: that (mostly) illustrated hydro-industrial artefacts set within a (notionally) wild environment.

Thirdly, I explored the visual manifestations of wildness evident in flowing water. This approach was designed to offer imagery of a wild and unfamiliar environment. Some images facilitated an imaginative interpretation: one that, to me, illustrated communication and information systems primarily intended for non-human recipients.

With time and feedback, I refined all three of these approaches.

### **Still imagery**

An image, whether painted, printed or electronically displayed, is not reality. It comprises, as Erwin Panofsky (1991, p. 29) put it, ‘...rather bold abstractions from reality.’ An underlying objective of my photography was to authentically represent what was there or, perhaps more accurately, what I experienced. This turned out to be intriguingly problematic. There are cultural and political symbols contained in all images and these can mislead to the point of deception. What concerns me is the authenticity of *my* images, and I have (mostly) followed some simple guidelines to establish and support that goal.

### *Image Preparation*

Beyond the incantations needed to summon a two-dimensional image from the electronic ether, little additional manipulation was applied. Some images were cropped slightly, or straightened. Some were corrected for intrinsic visual factors, such as white balance. Some had their luminance or contrast adjusted for emphasis. Beyond these adjustments, no changes were made to an image's visual content, either through addition, substitution, or subtraction. My goal was to retain the image's visual linkages with the reality it represented.

In my quest for affective representation, I initially thought to produce only subsurface images in colour, converting above-surface landscapes to monochrome. In part this was to differentiate my work from the formulaic full-colour approach to wild landscape imagery<sup>9</sup>. I also wanted to clearly separate the discourses arising from above and below the water's surface: the former easily visually apprehended and offering a more accessible discursive thread, the latter needing a broader comprehension of an unfamiliar environment, with recourse to an extra-human discourse.

The project's development, especially in terms of the direction that my subsurface imagery took, showed me that this mode of differentiation was unnecessary: itself being superficial and somewhat contrived. Given its venerable history, monochrome landscape imagery could be equally as prone to formulaic convention as could colour. Producing all of the imagery in colour felt much more congruent with my responses to the places I was photographing.

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<sup>9</sup> David Stephenson provided a salient critique of the formulaic deficiencies of wilderness photography in his paper, *Beautiful Lies: Photography and Wilderness* (Stephenson 2005). See Chapter 3: *Praxis / Wilderness and Wildness*.

## Subsurface Explorations

Initially, I expected subsurface imagery to be somewhat limited: a curious adjunct to the project's more numerous above-surface landscapes. Happily, my preconception turned out to be wrong.

I obtained the subsurface imagery by wading in the various streams at likely looking locations. I would select a general orientation (facing upstream, down, or across, for example) and submerge the camera to an appropriate depth, before taking the photograph. I experimented with a range of shutter speeds in this process. The deeply shadowed and, at times, highly coloured<sup>10</sup> water frequently necessitated shutter speeds at which camera movement might blur the image.

Being physically present within the water flow with the camera often created artefacts: eddies and other intrusions that interfered with the subsurface dynamics that I was trying to capture. To avoid this sort of unwanted effect, I chose the smallest camera 'footprint' consistent with image quality.

I also needed to minimise my own physical interference in the water column. To achieve this, I surrendered the utility of the camera's viewfinder, which use necessitated the intimate physical presence of my head and upper body, compounding the physical intrusion of the camera. By not using the viewfinder, I was able to hold the camera at arm's length (with suitable provision for camera stability). In this way, the only local intrusion into the flow was the relatively small camera and my forearms and hands. I could usually position my body at the side of the current or in some other configuration that didn't affect the flow or other dynamic aspect that I was trying to capture.

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<sup>10</sup> Many Tasmanian streams are naturally coloured yellow-orange by acidic components originating from swampy areas. The water is clear and transparent, but tea-coloured.

A tripod proved ineffective due to its physical intrusion in the water flow and the uneven and often unpredictable substrate. The camera was more effectively stabilised by bracing it against convenient solid objects.

Physically separating myself from the viewfinder extended the process of receptivity (see Chapter 1: *Foundations / Rationale / Field Practices*) by removing any accurate visual reference to subject prior to taking the photograph. It was only after capturing the images and removing the camera from the water that I could see the result. Repeated exposures of the same subject were difficult, if not impossible, in so dynamic an environment. Each image was unique.

Of course, the reality was never as simple as the brief description above. Many streams required considerable physical effort to access and the southwest Tasmanian vegetation was characteristically indifferent to my desire for unobstructed passage, either along the stream banks or within the water itself. Perhaps the earliest lesson I learned was the debilitating effect of cold-water immersion on my hands and forearms. I soon equipped myself with long neoprene gloves during the colder months to counteract this.

Another problematic issue was sun exposure. I chose not to use sunblock because of its potential toxicity to in-stream organisms. This necessitated maintaining full skin coverage when walking to, from, and working within, the streams. Long-sleeved shirts and fingerless gloves protected my forearms and the backs of my hands, which were frequently immersed as well as sun-exposed. They also helped shield me from the ever-present mosquitos.

Each evening in camp, I downloaded the day's images onto a laptop computer and reviewed the results. This allowed me to assess the day's work and

determine if a return visit was needed. It also allowed me to modify my technique if needed.

I quickly realised that, as well as providing interesting views of the in-stream environment, the subsurface images had the capacity to illustrate the flow dynamics of a particular location in both literal and poetic forms. This discovery, in turn, led to a more profound realisation that I was not only capturing affective aesthetic images, but also recording aspects of extra-human information flows. I was capturing fragments of a discourse of Otherness: of the wildness present in these streams. *An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water*, below, discusses this aspect in more detail.

### **Video imagery**

At most locations, I captured video clips in association with the still subsurface images. From these I put together video works that helped express my responses to those particular places.

Two aspects of the video compilations were often problematic. The first was that moving imagery tended to visually bypass the dynamic effects that I was trying to represent. In general, things happened too quickly to be consciously apprehended. So, while the clips represented the locations and gave an overview of the fluvial processes, they tended to be less effective than still images at representing them.

The second aspect derives from the first. In order to generate video works that might be more affective, I experimented with emphasising particular parts of the

imagery that expressed my rationalised ideas directly. The results were often overworked and less than satisfactory. This approach was not pursued further.

### **Voice and Vision: Speaking of Place**

I found that some experiences I encountered in the course of my fieldwork required a broader narrative than photographic imagery alone could offer. They needed an approach that was more layered, and that would provide a deeper, more personal, and often extra-human, perspective.

The spoken word, being a purely human occupation, is fundamentally anthropocentric. Poetic language, accessing allegorical and imaginative worlds beyond the human, can be used to transcend anthropocentrism, much as my poetic images do.

Drawing on the audio-visual heritage that, in this region, was exemplified by the work of Olegas Truchanas (see Chapter 3: *Praxis / Environmental Advocacy*), I explored a combination of vision and voice as a mode of affective representation. My published work, *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River*, made use of this approach (see Chapter 5: *Revelation / A Performative Work*).

### **Places**

Over the course of the project, I undertook a total of twenty field trips, of one to five days' duration, to access sites around the two impoundments, as well as a number of inflowing streams and other key locations. Two extra-catchment streams, the unregulated Anne River and the weir-regulated Edgar Pond outflow, were also visited.



As described in Chapter 1: *Foundations / Wildness and Artefact / The Impoundments*, Gordon and Pedder were created to provide water to the Gordon Power Station. Both are of similar surface area, if not storage capacity. It was the means of utilising their stored water that differed markedly.

### The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence

Three dams created the Pedder Impoundment: Serpentine in the west, and Edgar and Scotts Peak in the east. Pedder's water is diverted into the Gordon Impoundment via McPartlans Canal. Figure 4.1 shows the infrastructure and field locations around the Pedder Impoundment.



Figure 4.1: Field sites, the canal, and dams around the perimeter of the Pedder Impoundment (Map image courtesy of Google Earth).

Chapter 1: *Foundations / Wildness and Artefact / Divergent Trajectories* indicates that the Pedder Impoundment has a restricted operating range of 1.53 m. This appears to have been a part of the original plan for the power scheme (Hydro-Electric Commission 1969, p. 3; 1967, p. 20, Parliament of Tasmania 1967, p. 13). A provision for the Governor to authorise a further 1.53 drawdown<sup>11</sup> has rarely been invoked. Even during the energy crisis of 2015-16, when all other hydropower impoundments in the state were drawn down to record low levels, the Pedder Impoundment did not fall below the legislated minimum threshold. Figure 4.2 shows the daily water level recordings for the Pedder Impoundment from late January to the end of July 2016.

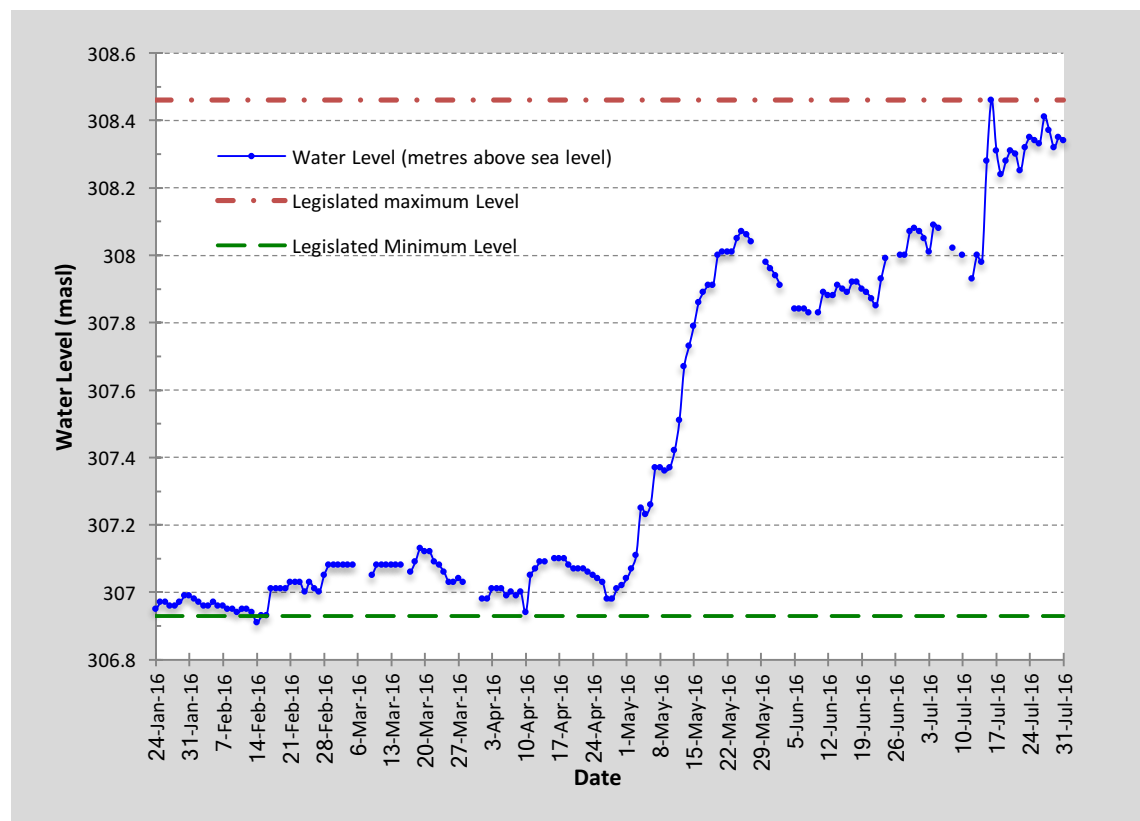


Figure 4.2: Daily water levels in the Pedder Impoundment from late January to the end of July 2016 (data courtesy Hydro Tasmania website <<http://www.hydro.com.au/water/lake-levels>>).

<sup>11</sup> *Electricity Supply Industry Restructuring (Savings and Transitional Provisions) Act 1995*, section 14.3.

A natural water body of the Pedder Impoundment's size would be likely to have a much greater water level range, driven primarily by the seasonality of rainfall and evaporation. This indicates that the Pedder Impoundment has been subjected to an unnaturally persistent presence of water that takes little account of seasonal or inter-annual weather patterns.

Within the impoundment the engineered persistence is expressed in two ways. The first is demonstrated by the development of macrophyte beds in shallower areas, which are able to survive due to the limited water level range. The second is expressed by (now) littoral vegetation that is able to withstand continuous waterlogging, such as the trees that survive, perched on their root systems as the soil around them is eroded away.

In terms of riverine processes, the inflow of the Huon River has formed a quasi-deltaic wetland system, comprising aquatic and terrestrial vegetation. The persistent levels keep the adjacent water table high, with little seasonal variation. Often, the water lies within the heathland vegetation, temporally extending what had once been a winter-spring phenomenon.

Another artefact of this large water body may be observed in its effect on the area's weather patterns. Rainfall, storms and mists are all affected by this extensive, thermally stable, source of evaporative potential.

In summary, it appears that the carefully engineered operations of the Pedder Impoundment were devoted to an entirely anthropocentric aesthetic aimed at improving on the scenic amenity provided by the original lake, and thus justifying its inundation (see Knight 1972). By removing the seasonal patterns and limiting water level variability, the outcome has become a parody of that

design. The model of unchanging scenic amenity is one that has little relevance outside tourist brochures. Its incorporation into an industrial artefact the size of the Pedder Impoundment may have been politically acceptable in the 1960s. Some fifty years later it can be seen as environmentally disruptive: a deceptive fabrication. That fabrication goes even deeper with the realisation that almost 90% of the water in the Pedder Impoundment is not available for the purpose (electricity generation) for which it was, supposedly, created. Lake Pedder Restoration Incorporated has consistently contested the description of the Pedder Impoundment as a water storage because of this<sup>12</sup>. Almost 3 km<sup>3</sup> of water is employed solely to maintain the usable 0.37 km<sup>3</sup> at an appropriate elevation.

An unsought benefit of this design has been to protect the original lake from the erosive effects of wind and wave. News reports indicate that Lake Pedder appears to be geomorphically undisturbed, some 15 m below the surface (Bolger 2015).

### **The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal**

Although slightly larger in surface area than Pedder, the Gordon impoundment is much deeper and holds a considerably greater volume of water (see Chapter 1: *Foundations / Wilderness and Artefact / The Impoundments*). Figure 4.3 shows the key field sites around the Gordon Impoundment.

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion, see the Lake Pedder Restoration Incorporated website: <<https://lakepedder.org>> (accessed 21 January 2017).



Figure 4.3: Field sites around the Gordon impoundment (Map image: Google Earth).

The Gordon Impoundment's operating regime is unrestricted and has, until recent years, demonstrated an approximately 18-year cycle of filling and draining, related to the balance between power generation and long-term precipitation patterns. Figure 4.4 shows the water level record for the Gordon Impoundment since shortly after its original filling commenced. Historically, Gordon's operating regime has allowed extensive vegetative regeneration in the higher littoral elevations, generally at sites that were exposed for ten years or more.

The relatively recent inception of the Basslink Interconnector cable, which provides access to the National Electricity Market and its ongoing demand for peak energy, has broken the inherently conservative operating nexus previously applied to the Tasmanian electricity generation system.



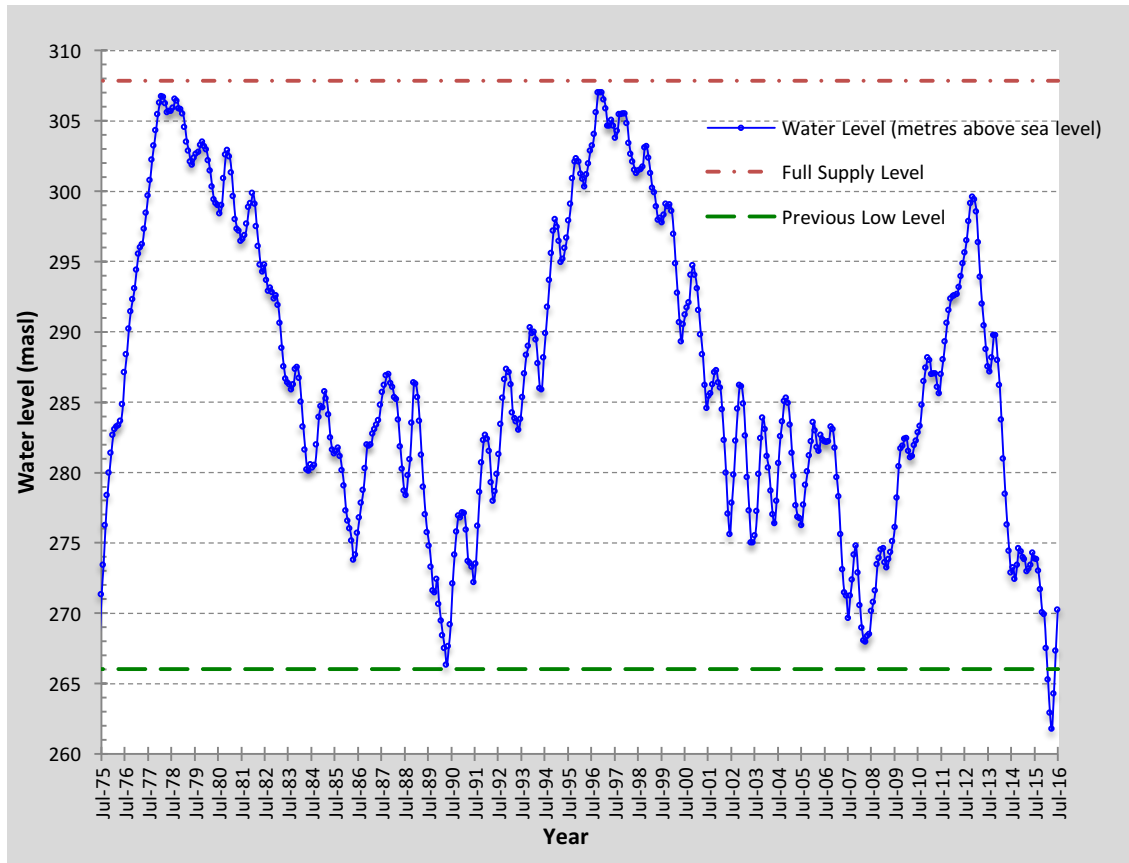


Figure 4.4: Average monthly water levels in the Gordon impoundment since initial filling, showing the extreme low level recorded in early 2016 (data courtesy Hydro Tasmania).

One outcome of this change was the relatively sudden drawdown of the Gordon Impoundment from a peak level of around 8 m below FSL in late 2012 to a record low level, more than 46 m below FSL in March 2016. Figure 4.4 shows the truncation of the long-term pattern and the impoundment's rapid return to minimum levels in only 8 years (instead of the previous ~18-year period).

This market-driven plunge in water level exposed a significant area of the impoundment that had remained submerged since the original flooding in 1974. At its lowest level (recorded on 1 April 2016) the impoundment's surface area was almost half that at FSL, exposing a 130 km<sup>2</sup> littoral<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Hydro Tasmania data for Lake Gordon: Rating Table 130.00 Water Level (Metres) to 130.02 Surface Area (Square Kilometres), courtesy Hydro Tasmania.

*Water's Withdrawal in Ragged Basin*

The withdrawal of the impounding water revealed absences. The living forests, heathlands, and moorlands that once filled the valley that is now called Ragged Basin were absent, as were the life forms that inhabited them. Skeletal trees pointed skyward, toward what would previously have been the under-surface of the impoundment: indicating the absence of the water that killed them. In other places, the ground was mostly peat-black, signifying the absence of heath and moorland vegetation. At the very bottom of the valley, receding pools were thickly littered with upended tree stumps and surrounded by heaped logging debris.

*Pre-impoundment Deforestation*

Extensive logging occurred in the eastern areas of the Gordon Impoundment prior to, and during, its initial filling. Under more than 40 metres of water, trophic processes and the energies that drive them were minimal: indistinct, dissipated by the richly coloured water, and undisturbed by surface wind and wave. A form of stasis developed, preserving the hidden relics of that logging.

A rusted chainsaw chain crowned the stump of the tree that wore it out. A snigging cable encircled its last tree trunk: resting now in an embrace of slow, mutual exfoliation. A shattered safety helmet protruded from beneath the log that crushed it.

It would have been easy to indulge a nascent melancholy. The area of destruction was large and the desolate assemblage of shapes and thoughts was initially overwhelming. And yet there were pathways through the devastation, some tangible, some less so, which offered alternative perceptions. It was by

being there, feeling the desolation, and exploring the mesh of conceptual and energetic pathways that my experience of the place began to emerge.

### *Regeneration*

Following its decades of inundation, the place beneath Ragged Basin had been returned to the powers of sunlight, air, and southwest Tasmania's wild abundances of wind and rain. Regenerative processes began and myriad extra-human energies commenced their diverse discourses.

In the lower reaches, pool margins and snagging track swales were tinted green as various plant and microbial assemblages established themselves in advantageous habitats. Figure 4.5 illustrates the beginnings of terrestrial regeneration in the wheel ruts of a long-inundated logging track.



Figure 4.5: The spreading greenness: regeneration in a snagging track swale (Ragged Basin, November 2014).



The bare mud was cracking and curling into a grey polygonal mosaic, adding texture and creating hiding places for small things. An optimistic wombat had dug a fresh burrow under the outspread buttresses of a long dead, but still-standing, tree trunk. Banks of aquatic plants populated the still shallows, providing shelter and habitat diversity.

At higher elevations, juvenile trees and shrubs colonised suitable locations, and marsupial grazers littered the evolving greensward with fertiliser. The relict snigging tracks became frogs' breeding pools, tiger snakes' hunting grounds, and macropod highways.

These emergent patterns of regeneration grew more visible with the passing seasons. Layers of colour spread across the landscape, overlaying the dismal greyness, obscuring some of the excesses, softening the sharp edges.

### *Fluvial Regeneration*

A different mode of energetic expression, that of flowing water, returned to Ragged Basin. The retreat of the impoundment's engulfing water allowed the area's streams to reclaim their once-silted beds and restore longitudinal fluvial pathways, along with their lateral riparian influences.

And the rivers celebrated, generating the turbulence needed for air entrainment and thus providing the oxygenation that powers aquatic life. Plumes of bubbles were ejected from the log cataracts, describing the current's variance, displaying the stream's communications to its aquatic fauna.

It was an aural recitation: high velocity turbulence here, an eddy there, a bifurcation by that snag, still water in a deep pool. The streams created a fluid

plainsong: chanting a chance to rest, or a place to hide, amid the streamers of algae, waving in the lee of logs.

As a living being, I could not help but respond to the noise, humidity, coolness, and power these waterways exuded. It was a meaningful fluvial discourse not usually accessible to humans. This is the representational arena that I feel most effectively invokes a visceral attachment to water's wild and living agency. It has the potential to touch the instinctive, pre-rational wildness that lives within each of us, beneath the frangible veneer of rationality.

### *The Mythic Forest*

In early 2016, Tasmania's energy crisis resulted in the Gordon Impoundment being drawn down to historically low levels (see Figure 4.4, above). This extreme withdrawal revealed a relict rainforest that, despite being under tens of metres of water for over forty years, retained the structures of the original forest in a mummified form. Delicate webs of fine tree roots endured: interlaced along fallen logs. Standing tree skeletons still straddled the ancient logs that once provided a substrate for their seedling selves. A jungle of tall sticks surrounded the margins of the forest: vestiges of the transitional vegetation that once protected the forest's microclimate. And throughout this structurally preserved forest, the Boyd River was busily reclaiming the network of channels that once watered this part of the valley.

A layer of silt covered the forest floor, drying into reticulated plates that, in cracking, revealed the original deep forest duff that had accumulated over centuries. Amazingly, seedlings began sprouting from beneath the silt covering,

out of the spongy duff: their seeds dormant all these years under the deep cold water, and now bursting with incipient life.

The effects of the market-driven withdrawal were more than just the notable absence of impounding water. A complex narrative unfolded itself in the exposed littoral. It spoke of the desolation produced by impoundment and logging: curating its relics with museum-like precision. It described, with myriad examples, the preservative powers of deep, cold water. It celebrated the re-establishment of dynamic systems in a recitation of cobwebs and mud-wasp industry. It displayed regenerative capabilities unimagined and previously unrecorded.

It was a place that offered both tragedy and comedy: transience and futility. The rains returned. Refilling commenced. The withdrawal was, itself, withdrawn. Death and dying returned to quench the regeneration: to quell its incipience.

## **Rivers and Streams**

In addition to the visual differences between impoundments, it was important to investigate the waterways associated with them. Such streams are integral components of the power development and have been variously exposed to anthropogenic effects. For reference purposes, I also visited streams that were outside the impoundments' catchments.

A number of the streams were unnamed by the mapmakers, and are marked as such in the figures above. For clarity, I coined colloquial names for them, usually related to some characteristic of the stream. These are shown in brackets, e.g.

Unnamed (Museum) Creek. Subsequent references in this exegesis will simply use the informal name, i.e. Museum Creek.

It quickly became apparent that each waterway had its own character. This manifested itself in its riparian vegetation, through which I had to pass in order to reach the water, and its flow characteristics. Some streams had been directly impacted by anthropogenic factors, such as industrial logging, which caused increased sedimentation and a loss of riparian vegetation in streams flowing into the Gordon impoundment. These included the Boyd River and Museum Creek in Ragged Basin, and Unnamed (Erratics) Creek in Boyes Basin (see Figure 4.3).

Road building impacts were a factor for streams in the eastern Pedder catchment (Huon River, Condominium Creek, and Unnamed (Jittery) Creek: see Figure 4.1). The stream channels downstream of road crossings had been straightened and cleared of obstructions to allow floodwaters to quickly recede from bridge footings and road foundations. Figure 4.6 shows a juvenile Huon pine growing along the banks of Condominium Creek. Flood flows had intertwined debris discarded from road construction within its branches.

Historic pinning activities have, in the past, affected both Condominium Creek and the Anne River. These streams supported populations of Huon pine that were avidly sought and removed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gibson *et al.* 1991, pp. 215-6). These trees are only now beginning to re-establish themselves (see Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6:** Rebar from upstream road construction snagged in bankside vegetation that includes a juvenile Huon Pine (Condominium Creek, November 2013).

Streams flowing away from the impounding structures, such as the Huon and Gordon Rivers were deprived of their original discharges. Any flow was limited to runoff from local drainage, or leakage.

These factors provided many opportunities for visual exploration. And this is where my subsurface photography was directed: at recording a range of visual nuances evident in the area's streams. I concentrated on seeking out the wildness evident in flowing water, and my approach is detailed in the next section.

## An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water

As discussed in Chapter 1: *Foundations / Rationale / Research Questions*, I have chosen water to be the element through which my imagery re-presents key topics of the thesis. I have primarily represented liquid water (or its absence) as the

narrative subject for discussing the divergent characteristics of the impoundments and for representing aspects of wildness. Where appropriate, I have also used water vapour, expressed as cloud or mist, plus the odd bit of weather.

In Chapter 2: *Theoria / Toward Recognising the Entity of Water*, I introduced the notion of water's wild agency and its relevance to both this project and contemporary human society. This section adds to that discussion by considering the subsurface representation of water.

### **Beyond Water's Superficial Representation**

Artistic depictions of water, especially in two-dimensional media such as painting and landscape photography, have traditionally shown water from above its surface: a literally superficial perspective. Such an approach is rational for a terrestrial species that stands well above the ground and utilises vision as its primary sensory medium. From this perspective water offers a comprehensive array of representational forms that suit orthodox landscape tropes.

My subsurface imagery moves that perspective from above the surface to below it. I found subsurface images of turbulent water to be intriguing and exciting. Some offered a literal reading of the subject. Others were more ambiguous: poetic, offering few visual cues and much more (apparent) chaos.

### **A Wild Discourse**

Despite their unfamiliar environment, some subsurface landscape images are easily interpretable. They may have a horizon (of sorts). They may even exhibit aspects of perspective and gradations of the visual plane, through shadow,

tonality, and focus. These characteristics form an energetic aesthetic framework for the narrative of water's wild agency. They link the unknown wildness in water with the known visual conventions of landscape imagery.

Such literal subsurface images contain identifiable objects: visual anchors that support an accessible, rational narrative, as illustrated in Figure 4.7. While there is no horizon or ambient light source apparent, there are interpretable subsurface analogues of these. Bubble traces produce lines that reinforce a linear perspective, providing clues about image depth.

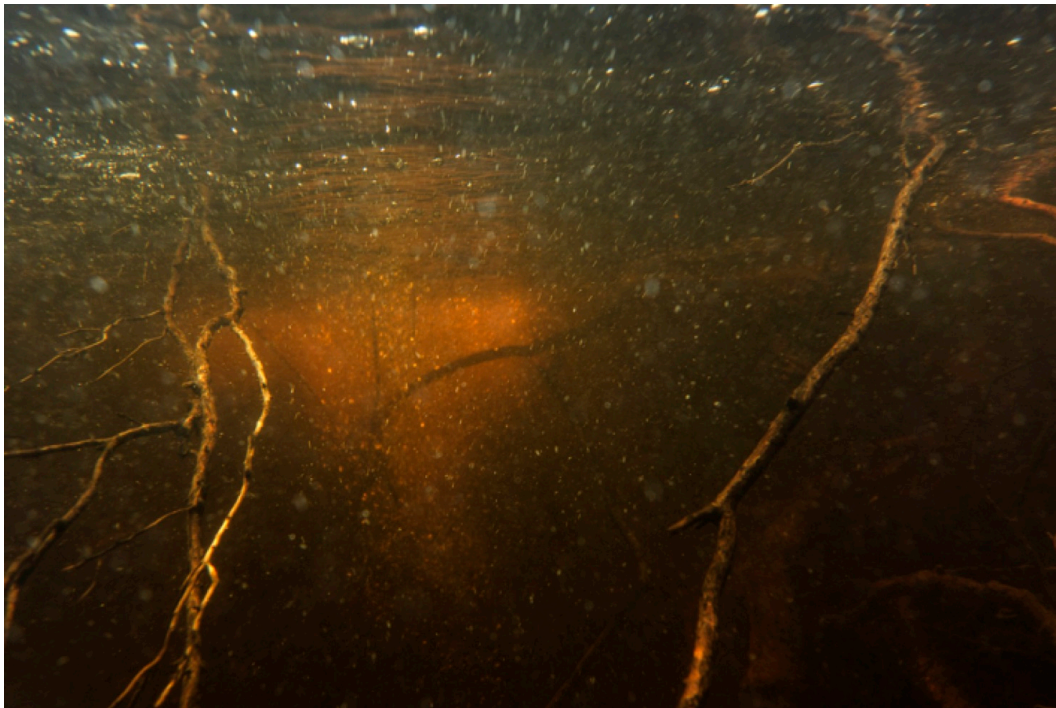


Figure 4.7: *Waterhole, Jittery Creek* (November 2013).

One outcome of the field trips was a progressive swing towards picturing what I perceived to be water's extra-human agency. The turbulence in flowing water added a chaotic element to the imagery that, in some cases, overshadowed the literal reading, facilitating an increasingly imaginative, often poetic, interpretation.



In some images, conventional landscape cues are missing or greatly reduced. They are poetic rather than literal representations, tending to have few or no visual anchors to ground the narrative in literal form. Aspects of composition are not clear: appearing chaotic, ill defined, and perhaps visually contradictory. This creates an uncertainty: of scale, depth, or even orientation. There is a narrative, and it is based in imagination rather than any discernible object. It is free from the visually literal in the way that, in language, poetry is free.

Many of these ambiguous images have the appearance of abstractions, though they are not. All of the images, subsurface or otherwise, are accurate representations of the scene they captured. There are a number of reasons for the project's exploration of poetic aquatic imagery.

Firstly, in conjunction with the subsurface environment, it disrupts a conventional landscape reading. The subject appears to be chaos or, at least, the marks of chaos: a buffeting turbulence, more viscerally felt than rationally defined. Such images challenge the imagination for some sort of resolution.

Secondly, as a result of the disruption and ambiguity, such images offer the chance to consider an extra-human perspective: one that is relevant to, for example, in-stream biota. Such a perspective provides a glimpse into the abyssal volume of information, and diversity of experience, that lies beyond purely human sensibilities. The image shown in Figure 4.8 is a good poetic example.

There is no identifiable visual anchor. The image has a rotating feel, marked by the contrast between dark areas and light. Formally, there appears to be a vortex in the lower left-of-centre, into which other inflows are feeding. However, that



interpretation is easily contradicted since the flow direction is not fixed. The vortex could equally be radiating outward.



Figure 4.8: *Untitled*, *Museum Creek*, *September 2015*.

The narrative cues are ambiguous and bear little apparent allegiance to linear perspective. A certain image-depth is suggested by the sharpness of the short white lines scattered about the lower part of the image, but spatial separation is weak.

Energy appears to swirl in and around the image, offering scope for an imaginative interpretation: inviting the percipient to enter and feel the turbulent narrative, in the implied flows. Scale is unreferenced: the image may represent something as small as a trickle or as large as a galaxy.

This image is nevertheless an accurate representation of an underwater scene. It relies on allowing ambiguity, and employing imagination, to produce a visual resolution (or, indeed to maintain not knowing). I consider that this image

inhabits a liminal space between the human need to decipher pattern and the apprehension of non-human processes and designs. It illustrates flowing water's diversity of communications within its dynamic formal attributes. The image is open to interpretation in both aesthetic and extra-human tropes. It functions in both anthropocentric and ecocentric paradigms.

### **Aquatic Calligraphy**

Some subsurface images show intriguing markings, which are the tracings of bubbles that were scribbled across the image during exposure. Turbulence drives air entrainment in the water column. Reflected sunlight produces traces that mark the bubbles' passages through the camera's field of view. These traces are dependent on dynamic drivers: the sun's brightness; the water's velocity; and the shutter speed by which their trace is captured. Figure 4.9 (p. 101) offers an example of this aquatic calligraphy.

Susan Sontag (1977, p. 120) likened photography to a tracing of the subject: 'something directly stencilled off the real'. The calligraphic marks in my images compound that metaphor: they are tracings of the travels of bubbles through the water column, within the overall 'trace' of the photographic image. Extra-human wildness traced over the technological stencilling: fluid dynamics made visible; ephemeral mark making by natural processes.

In human terms, calligraphy is codified, stylised, and meaningful mark-making. It could be argued that that is also a suitable descriptor for the aquatic bubble-traces. Such marks are codified by the prevailing flow and stylised by sunlight. I like to think of the marks as textual and meaningful, albeit in an alien script.

They represent a temporal integration of the processes occurring within flowing water at a particular location. This aspect provides a timely opportunity to speculate on human perceptual limitations and what ontological opportunities exist beyond our unfamiliarity with the extra-human world. I feel that, rather than being a spurious artefact of the photographic process, aquatic calligraphy illustrates naturally generated information that may be vital to in-stream biota.

## Discursive Threads

So far, this section has discussed subsurface imagery in terms of both literal and poetic representations. It has also indicated the potentially greater significance that I have attached to poetic imagery, which facilitates access to a broader perspective than that offered by a purely rational, human-centred one.

It is my belief that humans are capable of interpreting such (apparently) non-human patterns in instinctive ways, primarily as a result of our bio-evolutionary heritage. In his book, *Sensitive Chaos* (1965), Theodor Schwenk described the many physical structures in the human body that evolved in response to, and which are therefore responsive to, fluid agency; be it air or water. What may appear visually or rationally chaotic in subsurface images may also be somatically congruent in some way.

Such familiarity may also be due to visceral responses that arise from our gestation in an aquatic environment. I can imagine that there would have been various pre-rational cues within this aquatic environment of which our antenatal selves would have become increasingly aware in very primal ways.

## Information and Imperceptibility

Human senses perceive an unknown portion of the information that engulfs the world. For example, people are unable to distinguish mobile phone or radio transmissions without the aid of associated technologies (thankfully). Perception is a product of evolutionary biology. Humans see more, and better, than many species. Neil Shubin (2009, pp. 150-3) reports that light sensing cells comprise some 70% of all sensory cells in a human body. He describes how humans see in full colour, for example, like other primates and unlike most other mammals.

There are aspects of dynamic aquatic processes, which people are unable to perceive without technical assistance. One characteristic of human vision that is relevant to my inquiry is the speed at which details are perceived. At fast water velocities humans tend to see an aggregated image and perceive it as the *form* of the flow. At slower velocities aspects of *detail* become prominent, at the expense of form. Of course, what one individual perceives is not necessarily what other people, or other organisms, do.

The perceptual transition from form to detail can be demonstrated by exploring a range of camera shutter speeds. With the naked eye a waterfall appears misty and relatively smooth: displaying the form of the flow. This is because the eye's perceptual 'speed' is much slower than the velocity of the falling water. An image taken with a camera at a shutter speed faster than the falling water would look quite different, with more detail and less form visible. Yet, the water itself hasn't changed in any way. It is only the perception of it that has altered. Figure 4.10 illustrates this point. It was taken at the same location and at much the same time as the image in Figure 4.9, and is another representation of aquatic calligraphy.





Figure 4.9: *Aquatic Calligraphy I, Condominium Creek, January 2015*. 1.0 sec. shutter speed.



Figure 4.10: *Aquatic Calligraphy II, Condominium Creek, January 2015*, 1/4 sec. shutter speed.

The essential difference between the images is their shutter speed. Figure 4.9 used a slower shutter speed (1.0 second) to record more of the overall form of the calligraphy. Figure 4.10 used a faster shutter speed (1/4 second) to record

more detail of individual traces, combined with aspects of the overall form from faster moving areas of the image. At an even faster shutter speed, the calligraphic lines would be reduced to a multitude of specular points.

### **In Search of an Extra-human Perception**

Some subsurface images combined aesthetic accessibility with visual ambiguity, and I wondered what other information these images might contain.

Just as birdsong or flower scent offer aesthetic experiences, they also carry information that is intended for others of their species, the meaning of which may be incomprehensible to humans. So too does flowing water. A stream's biota must require information about vital aspects of the flow in order to survive. It is easy to imagine that the apparent chaos of turbulence is actually part of the communications field of the stream.

I found it intriguing that my responses to such ambiguous imagery were often instinctive rather than purely aesthetic. This realisation led to my speculation that subsurface imagery, especially those images that resisted a literal interpretation (and thus a rational resolution), may offer a window into the vastness and wonder of the extra-human world. Such poetic imagery may take the percipient beyond a rational anthropocentric domain into the realm of imagination that encourages the conscious to extend beyond human physicality. It may allow consideration of, and empathy with, the extra-human world: the aquatic life that lives in the stream, and its perceptions of its environment.

My conception is that the more humanity can extend its perception beyond the purely anthropocentric, the more readily it can acknowledge its interrelationships with, and dependence on, the wild Other.

### *An Anthropocentric Perception*

There is logic behind this approach. The subsurface images that I have produced cover a range of aesthetic interpretations. The rational visual experience of this imagery runs out of steam somewhere amid the poetic images: the ones that look like abstracts: without visual anchors to logically ground the narrative.

These are received images. Beyond selecting the location, aiming the submerged camera and pressing the shutter, I had little precursory information about what the image would contain. It was during the selection process that my input was greatest. I picked, or discarded, based on my responses, and feelings, and mood. That selection was subjective and individual: I chose those images to which I was drawn, based on their (perceived) visual appeal. But what, I wonder, makes them so? If these images are windows into the extra-human universe, as I suggest, do they need to be aesthetically relevant to human viewers?

My initial response is that it makes the exploration more exciting and appealing if the images combine both human aesthetics and non-human energies, and especially so if they are able to trigger subliminal responses in individual percipients. Such images should appeal to the subconscious: to the visceral or instinctive selves that exist just beneath rationality's event horizon. I set out to explore some of my culturally conditioned aesthetic responses.

### *Linear Perspective*

I firstly explored the issue of perspective, which underlies received landscape conventions, especially those concerning gradations in the visual plane, signifying ‘image depth’. Erwin Panofsky (1991, p. 29) pointed out that the linear perspective system relies on two key assumptions: that a single, unmoving eye provides the central locus; and that the image is projected onto a flat surface. He noted that human vision is based on two moving eyes and that the received image falls on concave retinas, which combination produces a spheroidal field of vision (ibid., p. 31). Thus, any linear projection requires compromises in the transition from three-dimensional spheroid to two-dimensional surface (ibid., p. 36).

From this basis, Panofsky (ibid., p. 34) raised the salient point that, because of the ubiquity of representations using linear perspective, modern human perception intuitively adopts the necessary compromises. This makes linear perspective very much a culturally conditioned artefact. Other cultures, including those of pre-Renaissance Europe, would perceive ‘spatial reality’ differently.<sup>14</sup>

An artist who explored similar territory to my subsurface imagery was the English Romantic painter, J. M. W. Turner. Turner was Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy and was an acknowledged master of his profession (Bockemühl 2007, p. 9). Through some of his later paintings, he sought to express the tension between perspectival convention and invention by exploring the distinctions between visual perception and linear perspective

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<sup>14</sup> see Chapter 2: *Theoria / Alternative Worldviews* for a discussion on medieval and Yolngu perceptions and spatial representations.



(Ibata 2008, pp. 352-4). Ibata indicated that Turner explored an ellipsoidal construction in order to expand on standard perspective.

In Figure 4.11, *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth...* (1842), Turner avoided conventional visual locators, such as a shoreline or horizon, and obscured objects that might indicate scale. An apparently chaotic assemblage of wind-tossed waves compounds an ambiguous formal structure. Image depth is implied through texture and tonality (Ibata 2008, p. 356).



Figure 4.11: J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich*, 1842, oil on canvas, 914 x 1219 mm, Tate Britain, London<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Photographic Rights © Tate (2017), CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/work/N00530> (accessed 8 March 2017).

Turner's approach largely eliminated reliance on linear perspective. The implied dynamic movement of the waves subverted any reference to a fixed, monocular point of view (Ibata 2008, p. 357). Bockemühl (2007, p. 72) suggested that it is only small, vaguely defined elements that allow the painting to be seen as 'depicting anything at all'.

Turner's famous response to questions about this work demonstrates both his mastery and his awareness of its visual unorthodoxy.

I did not paint it to be understood, but I wished to show what such a scene was like. ... But no one had any business to like the picture.<sup>16</sup>

This discussion is important in the context of my project because I am looking for influences that might be acting on my selection of poetic subsurface images. As Panofsky (1991, p. 31) pointed out, a camera is a single, unmoving 'eye' recording onto a flat surface. That the subsurface images were captured on a device that persistently keeps them within the aegis of linear perspective represents a consistently applied bias. However, drawing on Turner's example, my poetic subsurface images, with their apparent chaos, absence of visual locators and other cues to perspectival orientation, are acting to subvert the linear perspective imposed by the camera.

### *An Inverted Perspective*

In pursuit of other potential sources of visual bias, I undertook an extensive examination of poetic images. I rotated hundreds of subsurface images through 180°, that is, by turning them upside-down. The images offered no visual cues to provide orientation, so that any apparent narrative was a product an imaginative

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<sup>16</sup> Butlin & Joll 1984, p. 247 quote John Ruskin reporting a conversation between Turner and William Kingsley, in which Turner described being lashed to a ship's mast for four hours to record the scene.

or instinctive response to the patterns within the image. Would such narratives survive inversion? Many did not.

I found that a few images felt more visually congruent when read from left to right, indicating a weak, but present, bias suggested by the reading conventions of Western culture (themselves an abstracted form of pattern recognition).

I also found that some images changed narrative when inverted, offering a different visual interpretation. There are, of course, numerous examples of art that can be inverted for one purpose or another. Images of reflections are an example. However, they almost always look like inverted images, with no suggestion of a change in narrative interpretation.

A key physical feature of human existence is an upright visual orientation defined by gravity. And unpleasant feelings may result when this orientation is disturbed as, for example, in motion sickness. Humans are strongly biased towards 'uprightness'.

I tried to imagine an aquatic organism that is neutrally buoyant, or able to control its buoyancy. Such buoyancy might make a gravity-defined orientation optional, perhaps even redundant. Although some aquatic organisms, such as bony fishes, have structures (otoliths) that orient the animal to gravity, others such as jellyfish are apparently oriented by light. Some may have different orientation cues, such as current. If this were the case, then an upside-down orientation may be both common and interpretable.

Could an inverted perspective be equally informative to such biota as the original orientation? This speculation offers further impetus for considering the extra-human information and visual cues offered in subsurface imagery.

### *A Discursive Summary*

The subsurface photographic processes I employed captured aspects of water's wildness that are not visible to the unaided human eye. I have discussed a number of ways in which the resultant images have the capacity to extend human perception into the information dynamics of the extra-human world that surrounds anthropocentric reality, and vastly exceeds it. I have also speculated on some of the biases that may be affecting my perceptions of the extra-human.

These discursive explorations nibble at the threshold of new knowledge, prompting imaginative speculation on how this expanded universe might function. They offer an opportunity to peer into the depths of Otherness, potentially providing a glimpse of fresh ontological avenues of perception.

As Thoreau (1939, p. 318) expressed in *Walden*:

We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.

## 5 Revelation

### Introduction

This chapter, *Revelation*, details the artworks that arose from my practice-based investigations, and how those works address the project's research questions.

*The Examination Exhibition* discusses the exhibition's structure and the rationale underlying it. *The Photographic Prints* describes the print artworks that form the major part of the project's original examination exhibition. They are organised into four contextual groups. Each addresses a key aspect of *Wildness and Artefact*:

- *Prologue*;
- *The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence*;
- *The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal*; and
- *Water's Communicative Wildness*.

*A Performative Work* describes the rationale and background for *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River*.

*Research Questions Revisited* details how the project addressed its formative research questions. These speak to the themes of re-presenting water's wildness, the impoundments and their divergent drivers, and furthering visual discourse.

## The Examination Exhibition

The examination exhibition, *Wildness and Artefact: Re-presenting the Divergent Trajectories of Lakes Gordon and Pedder*, presents the artworks that embody the outcomes of my practice-based project. These comprise twenty-nine photographic prints, which use Epson Ultrachrome archival inks on Canson Platine fibre rag paper. Each print has an image size of 600 high x 900 mm wide.

These works address the central theme of *Wildness and Artefact*, in response to the research questions formulated at the beginning of the project, and discussed later in this chapter. They focus on aspects of water, or its absence, as the principal agent in both wild and artificial processes, and as the key element driving the divergent trajectories of the two impoundments.

The project was an exciting and challenging undertaking, exploring a complex array of often-unanticipated *things*: with, of course, wondrous and diverse discoveries. The exhibition is necessarily both a selective simplification and creative distillation of those results.

The exhibition's structure takes advantage of the space available in the Plimsoll Gallery. The part of the gallery devoted to my exhibition is divided into four visually separated spaces, including:

- An entry vestibule in which the prologue work, *A Cryptic Conversation: Dead Wood with Live Birds*, is located;

- A section devoted to photographic prints of *The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence* series;
- A section displaying the prints of the *Water's Communicative Wildness* series; and
- A section devoted to *The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal* print series.

The prints are presented as simply as possible. They are evenly lit, unframed, in a 'landscape' orientation, and identically sized. A number of the images in the exhibition purposefully incorporate an ambiguity of scale, in order to invoke an imaginative interpretation; a perceptual shift from literal to poetic. To support the utility of such ambiguity, the prints needed to be uniform in size.

Also, I felt that each of the images has an individual, often multi-layered story that should be presented equally. I chose this approach to ensure that there was as little mediation as possible between the image's visual narrative and the viewer. This was consistent with the approach I took toward the images' production and the notion of receptivity with which the images were captured (see Chapter 4 *Evolution / Representation / Still Imagery*). In short, I set about presenting the images in as personally authentic a manner as I could contrive.

The exhibition is spatially compartmentalised, to subtly restrict the view of a visitor to those works associated with that particular section. A circuit of the exhibition becomes an exploration: a movement between places. Each turning offers a different group of works with its own coherent narrative, and which complements the overall narrative of the thesis.

## The Photographic Prints

### Prologue: Wildness and Artefact

The prologue print, *A Cryptic Conversation: Dead Wood with Live Birds*, introduces the project by juxtaposing living avian wildness with the artefact of a dead, but still-standing, forest in the dewatered littoral of the Gordon Impoundment.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the interplay that has developed between the two.



Figure 5.1: *A Cryptic Conversation: Dead Wood with Live Birds* (Knob Basin, Gordon Impoundment, February 2015).

The colouration of the three wood ducks is cryptic against this background, offering them a relatively safe environment. The trees, skeletal and frail, are exfoliating: discarding desiccated twigs and branches to the fugitive wind. This woody detritus litters the slopes behind adding further to the camouflage. The sere trunks knock and scrape plaintively against each other in a windblown, dry-woody conversation that is rudely interrupted by the startled scrambling – the splashing and flapping and squawking – of the ducks.



## **The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence**

This group comprises eight prints that between them reflect aspects of the consequences of artificially limiting the water level variation in the Pedder Impoundment (see Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places / The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence*). The anthropogenic aim was to establish a view field of water and mountain ranges that surpassed that of the original Lake Pedder (Knight 1972, p. 1), irrespective of season or prevailing weather.

### *Weather*

The engineered persistence, in concert with wild processes, has produced intriguing, often unanticipated, results. The area experiences weather conditions that are, in some respects, influenced by the presence of such a large body of water.

Figure 5.2 shows a sample of southwest Tasmanian winter weather. The landscape becomes grey-on-grey as the low angled sun backlights heavy cloud and startles the eye with its intermittent, brittle brilliance. Rainfall is frequent and prolonged. The wind becomes lazier. Storms are common.

This photograph was taken in a brief interlude between showers. It was not a day to be wandering far from camp, but the sporadic sunlight was such a relief from the drab dampness of my tent that the risk was worth it. The image contrasts the uncertainty of the roiling clouds and the dense distant violence of Eliza's snowstorm with the stillness of the impoundment as it waits, expectantly: anticipating an oncoming squall. Here is water in its various weatherly manifestations and characters.



Figure 5.2: *A Persistence of Weather: Snowstorm over Mt Eliza* (Edgar Bay, Pedder Impoundment, July 2014).

In Figure 5.3, a small patch of water ribbons (*Triglochin* sp.) emerges from the shallows of Sprent Basin, on the western end of the Pedder Impoundment. It is set against a dissipating bank of mist, shortly after sunrise.



Figure 5.3: *Sprent Basin View Field* (Pedder Impoundment, May 2014).

The image is awash with irony and contradiction. The presence of the dominant element, water, is evident in the clouds, mist, and reflection. The symmetry of the image reframes the desired perfection of maintaining an almost constant water level. A shoreline is implied behind the mist. But that shoreline is ambiguous, insubstantial, loitering between the known and the not known: a picturesque failure of the engineered view field.

The mist is a direct consequence of the water's presence. The insubstantiality of the anthropogenic artefact (the view field) is contrasted with a slightly off-centre group of water plants whose very presence reflects both the engineered water level and interacting wild regenerative processes.

### *Adversity*

Figure 5.4 speaks of a different form of persistence: shoreline vegetation that can withstand almost continuous waterlogging thrives in some areas.



Figure 5.4: *An Abiding Flood* (Pedder Impoundment, July 2014).



Living trees appear to be perched on their roots as the soil is eroded from their bases: persisting in the face of wave induced adversity. to this aspect. In the quiet of a day's fading light, the sky retains traces of heretical colour.

Tomorrow's clouds tentatively tease the westerly mountaintops. A band of reflected skylight illuminates the bracing, exposed root system of the central Melaleuca. Four decades of wave wash has eroded the skeletal topsoil, leaving this group of trees poised, apparently refusing to acknowledge the persistence of the flood. They survive where other species have not because of their tolerance of waterlogging. Their tenacity gives them a front row seat for the next wave performance. Their persistence acts to protect the shoreline vegetation behind.

### *Escape*

Figure 5.5 shows an unexpected aspect of persistence: water's ability to insinuate itself past obstacles, in this case at Scotts Peak Dam.



Figure 5.5: *Leakage and Resurgence: The Huon Source* (Pedder Impoundment, January 2015).

With this small show of defiance, the efflux forms the *de facto* source of the Huon River. The image illustrates the transition from engineered order to elemental chaos. This wayward leakage springs from the base of the dam. A V-notch gauging weir shapes it into a coherent flow, the better to measure its rate of escape. But the errant flow interacts with wild processes, indicated by the turbulence that signals gaseous entrainment, and the specular brilliance denoting the solar energy input devoted to producing the exuberant growth of algae. This set of interactions is analogous of the life-creating processes that the resurgent Huon River will employ in its progress to the sea. It is also a metaphor for the inseparability of human desires from interactions with extra-human wildness.

### *Inflows & Wetlands*

Water plants take this chance to grow and expand their coverage, as shown in Figure 5.6, due to the impoundment's persistent water levels.



Figure 5.6: *Subsurface Garden, Condominium Creek Inflow* (Pedder Impoundment, December 2013).

Inflowing streams such as Condominium Creek are usually subject to seasonal flow variations, but the impoundment's water level counteracts this variability near the inflow's confluence. Figure 5.6 offers a literal representation of the subsurface habitat, with its garden-like abundance of growing things. In the top half, ripples on the water's surface distort a diffracted reflection of the emergent sedges.

The water level of Edgar Pond is kept artificially stable by a weir on its outflow: a small-scale replica of the adjacent Pedder Impoundment. Figure 5.7 shows filamentous roots spreading from central nodes. If conditions are right these rhizomatous appendages will form new nodes, extending the plant's distribution through the wetland.



Figure 5.7: *Rhizomatous Outreach, Edgar Pond* (Pedder Impoundment, November 2015).

In riparian wetlands adjacent to the Pedder Impoundment, such as Appendix Tarn, rhizomatous plants have formed an almost complete subsurface coverage of deeper pools, forming an aquatic mezzanine that allows other plants to



establish in the shallower environment thus created. This growth is another example of wild processes capitalising on the artefact of persistent water levels.

Parts of the Pedder Impoundment have developed conditions suitable for the establishment of macrophyte beds. These plants must be capable of coping with the 1.53 m water level variations. The growth form needs to be sufficiently flexible to survive the low water levels without becoming stranded, and the high water levels without being too deeply submerged.

Figure 5.8 shows a wall of plants, extending from the depths to just below the water's surface. New growth has formed on the outside face of the wall, while older parts of the plant float just below the surface to the left of the wall. This voluminous growth form allows the plants to spread out along the surface at low water, and contract to a wall-like form as the water level rises.



Figure 5.8: *Macrophyte Wall* (Pedder Impoundment, May 2014).

The discharge of inflowing streams is dissipated as it enters the impoundment. Figure 5.9 illustrates the quasi-deltaic macrophyte bed development at the Huon River confluence. It summarises the evolving trajectory of the Pedder Impoundment.



Figure 5.9: *The Wetland Aspirations of the Inflowing Huon River* (Pedder Impoundment, November 2015).

The approaching low clouds and their rainsqualls represent (in part) the effect of evaporation from the extensive water body. The emergent and surface water plants illustrate a process of wetland development as the Huon River's discharge is absorbed by the impoundment. The aquatic greensward extends for hundreds of metres into the impoundment. Flood debris deposited on the banks of the main river channel provides the substrate necessary to stabilise the plant beds. The relatively frequent withdrawal and refilling, largely independent of prevailing seasonal signals, acts to blur the boundary between terrestrial and aquatic environments, through the development of a liminal vegetation able to thrive in either.



## The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal

One of the characteristics of hydroelectric generation is the drawdown and refilling of storage impoundments in an inherently cyclic pattern, balancing power demand with the volume of inflowing water. As discussed in Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places / The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal*, the recent operations of the impoundment have been driven by market forces rather than the traditional Tasmanian power demand. In consequence, the impoundment has undergone a relatively rapid, and extreme, drawdown.

From its last high water level, in late 2012, to the record low in March 2016, the Gordon Impoundment was drawn down by almost 40 metres, exposing extensive littoral areas, some of which had not seen daylight in the impoundment's history. It exposed a diverse pre-impoundment topography, which raised the question of how to represent the place-ness of a cartographically non-existent location.<sup>17</sup>

The resulting set of prints, *The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal*, comprises ten images that explore four characteristic aspects of the exposed littoral:

- withdrawal (the absence of impounding water);
- deforestation (the relics of historic logging);
- aquatic regeneration (the restoration of littoral streams); and
- a mythic place (preserved deep beneath the impounding waters).

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<sup>17</sup> Since impoundment, the inundated area has been cartographically represented by a uniform pale blue colour. Submerged topography and places no longer appear. They have (officially) ceased to exist, hastening forgetfulness and engendering a mythic status for what once was.

This grouping contrasts those overtly anthropogenic processes of inundation and deforestation with the wild regenerative processes evident both on land and in the renewed flow of the valley's streams.

### *Withdrawal*

Figure 5.10 represents the withdrawal of water in the Gordon Impoundment. At first glance, it appears flat: there are few cues to image depth. The background is ambiguous. There is no frame: the image obviously extends beyond the edges of the photograph. The absence of a horizon presents a perspectival anomaly.



Figure 5.10: *Stasis* (Boyes Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).

It is an image of stillness, with which even the water colludes in its perfectly black reflections. The stillness suggests a form of stasis: of balanced tension. The slightest breeze would disrupt it. A latent temporal potential is suggested, of which this image represents a transient slice.

The artefacts of inundation are apparent in the dead trees and the innocent, skyward looking water that lurks beneath them, swaddling their trunks in anticipation: ready to re-engulf. The water will rise – has risen in the interim – in response to seasonal rains and runoff. Wild climatic energies have reasserted themselves: spoiling the would-be stasis, undermining notions of permanence.

Figure 5.11 shows the effect of the inundating water's withdrawal, representing a four-year absence of water at this location. The tops of the standing stems indicate, approximately, the impoundment's full supply level. A low mist acts as a damp surrogate.



Figure 5.11: *Withdrawal* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, September 2015).

The tree skeletons have stood since the original flooding. They gather their fallen branches about them as storms and wind threaten their arboreal structure. Some have fallen, to lie amongst the skeletons of *Gabnia* and other shrubs that regenerated and flourished during the last interregnum. Patches of vegetation,



orange-brown from the past winter, mark drainage lines. Spring's new growth begins to emerge: scattered suggestions of greenness receding in the dismal light.

Another artefact of impoundment is the appearance of zoomorphic shapes in the blasted landscape. Figure 5.12 shows a disintegrating tree bole, drowned, rotted and leached, which has taken on a skeletal, animal-like appearance. There are places in the peat lands where the desiccated remnants of shrubs - the core stem and primary roots - remain in large numbers. As the wind erodes the dry peat, these relict structures emerge, taking on the appearance of a varied multitude: some cast in apparent conversation, others seeming to step out, striding into the imagination of passing strangers.



Figure 5.12: *An Impoundment Relic* (Gordon Impoundment, November 2014).

Scattered green shoots in this image mark the beginning of a summer's regenerative censorship, as the first plants return to the recently exposed ground. Their rapid growth in this fecund neo-terrestrial environment will quickly mask the impoundment's beastly charade.

*Deforestation*

Figure 5.13 depicts a bare, drying substrate into which is woven a sinuous, rusting snagging cable: both are relics of historic logging activities in Ragged Basin. The cable - manufactured detritus - is a potent artefact of pre-impoundment logging. The textured substrate is an artefact of drawdown, a desiccated reminder of the absence of water. It is also an indirect artefact of industrial logging: the substrate layer is silt eroded from upstream clear felling.

The periodic disappearance and re-emergence of the exfoliating cable suggests that it extends beyond the image in both foreground and background. To me this image is allegorical of humanity's progress through the reduced, bare desolation of its own industrial creations. It represents progress of an exploitive, capitalist kind: created, controlled, discarded; devoid of wildness and, therefore, life.



Figure 5.13: *The Tidiness of Industrial Logging* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).



The urgency of pre-impoundment logging is evident in Figure 5.14. Museum Creek runs through a dismembered area of cut logs, scattered in disarray. There seems to have been no time for the usual piling up and burning of residue.



Figure 5.14: *The Untidiness of Industrial Logging* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, December 2014).

Perhaps even more interesting, the scattered debris does not appear to have redistributed itself during inundation: things have remained where they fell. An effect of inundation has been to preserve the location from the destructive effects of wind and sun, decay and time.

Wild processes have begun regeneration. Water plants indicate suitable aquatic habitats. Within a year, sedges and other terrestrial vegetation will cover all of the bare substrate.

Individually, these two images express potent narratives of the effects of industrial logging. These tableaux have been preserved by prolonged inundation. For the exhibition, I have linked them in a form of titular duality: tidiness and untidiness. The absurdity of this adds a humorous note to a potentially grim literal interpretation.

This pairing raises similar questions, in contemporary terms, to the coincidental pairing of the Ansel Adams *Moonrise...* and Robert Frank *U.S. 285...* images discussed previously (see Chapter 3 *Praxis / Wilderness Deconstructed / U.S. 285* (Ansel Adams and Robert Frank)). Although originating from different locations within Ragged Basin, *Untidiness...* invokes a sense of environmental advocacy: of the potential to remediate and protect a degraded landscape; of imagining the regeneration of the distant, overlooking wilderness. On the other hand, *Tidiness...* expresses the desolation of an entirely anthropogenic wilderness: an exile from Otherness; a landscape reduced to monochromatic desert, with a rusting relic providing the only visual diversity.

On a metaphoric level, the pairing reflects the divergence evident in the two impoundments. Pedder's invariant water level, its engineered 'tidiness', was designed to disguise the impacts of impoundment, whereas Gordon's chaotic littoral 'untidiness' resulted from the market-driven withdrawal of water and the wild regenerative processes thus unleashed.

The pairing presents a multi-layered epilogue to the *Gordon Impoundment...* series of images, and to the 'divergent' aspect of the overall project.

*Aquatic Regeneration*

Released from the oblivion of impoundment, flowing water has returned to Museum Creek in Ragged Basin. Figure 5.15 indicates that not much remains of its original stream environment, except for its clay foundation and remnant woody debris.



Figure 5.15: *Aquatic Regeneration* (Museum Creek, Gordon Impoundment, November 2014).

The resurgent flow introduces turbulence and energy, nutrients and oxygen.

Already the sunlight has encouraged algal growth. Soon other vegetative forms will follow, as they have done where conditions are less austere.

Wild processes have begun the restoration of the stream's complex structure and its diverse entity. These processes will continue until the impounding water returns to once again smother and dissipate.



*A Mythic Place*

As Tasmania's 2015-16 energy crisis deepened, I watched on my computer as the water level in the Gordon Impoundment fell to historic low levels. A remote-area bushfire closed the road into Tasmania's southwest for over two months. In March 2016, I was finally allowed access to Ragged Basin.

I found a place that had still been submerged in September 2015: unimagined, inaccessible, non-existent, mythic. Figure 5.16 is the first of four images from this location.



Figure 5.16: *The Mythic Forest Quartet I: Emergence* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).

In the intervening months, the continued drawdown exposed this place: retrieving it from myth, confirming its existence and allowing access. At first, however, it retained its unimagined status.

The improbability of standing in wet, muddy boots to capture this image still astounds me. Barely two days before the water level nadir, I could not know that within a week this place would return to its submerged non-existence.

The image's narrative speaks of both myth and absence. The absence (of water) is obvious from the dead trees and dry, cracked substrate. The mythic epithet derives from the fact that this view is now covered in water, and contemporary cartographic information speaks only of aquatic features (hence the name, Ragged Basin). The terrestrial features evident in the image therefore do not, in cartographic certainty, exist. To my mind, this makes them objects of myth.

Figure 5.17 is the second of the quartet. As soon as I encountered this wall of tree roots in the gelid evening light, I felt both cold and blocked.



Figure 5.17: *The Mythic Forest Quartet II: Barrier* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).

Rationally, I knew that the roots were in this form because of anaerobic soils deeper down, into which they could not trespass. And I knew that they were

long dead, drowned decades ago: well beyond revivification. Viscerally, I could feel them writhing, reaching, grasping, searching for a viable habitat. The two images, real and imagined, reverberated with a strange immanence: attracting and repelling simultaneously.

What thrilled me about my explorations in this mythic rainforest was how *impending* the place felt. Figure 5.18 shows the sun trying vainly to penetrate the mist. The shadowless forest remained half-dark, secretive: strangely tangible, yet shielding its mythic mystery.



Figure 5.18: *The Mythic Forest Quartet III: A Strange Tangibility* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).

It was as if the place was in the process of materialising, even as I moved through its long-dead, quasi-mummified, reaches: as if it was being newly created just beyond the curtain of mist that occluded the distant trees. Perhaps I'd arrived a little too early, before the finishing touches, like leaves and breeze, were applied.



Figure 5.19 depicts the mummified nature of this forest. Structurally intact, despite being dead these 40 years or more: immersed under 40 metres of cold, dark water. There are intimate details of the original forest, preserved, as if the energy flows still endured: commanding this and driving that to sustain the diverse and complex arboreal entity.



Figure 5.19: *The Mythic Forest Quartet IV: Endurance* (Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, March 2016).

The mat of mosses that once covered the top of the recumbent log and through which fine roots would roam, in search of water and nutrients, remains. The log must be an age old, supporting the younger tree that straddles it, reaching over, around, and through it. The younger tree still strives skyward, enduring, at least in its mummified parody.

Not all is caricature, though. Living seedlings erupted through the silty substrate, only to die when the water returned.

## Water's Communicative Wildness

This set of ten prints encapsulates the range of subsurface imagery that I recorded in the impoundments' inflowing streams, and the extra-catchment Anne River. The images are presented in a sequence. I felt that beginning with readily accessible literal landscapes would be a useful way of introducing the more dynamic and communicative aspects of flowing water. These are progressively presented with fewer visual reference points that might otherwise limit imaginative or instinctive interpretations. The sequence ends with two images that have been inverted, to challenge the notion of orientation as a necessary characteristic of subsurface landscape imagery.

My purpose with this sequence is to lead percipients from the quotidian to the threshold of the extraordinary: to provide glimpses into the realm of wild, extra-human Otherness.

Figure 5.20: *Anne Untitled* depicts a small tributary of the Anne River, bringing flow and information from the heights of the adjacent Schnells Ridge.

I don't know the full extent of the stream's communications, although colour forms a part of it, suggesting a different chemistry from the main river. I imagine the temperature was somewhat different also and, possibly, sound.

As I approached, the tributary's voice became clearer, more articulated, as it separated itself from the surrounding chatter of wind-through-leaves, remote birdcalls, and the still-distant rumble of the Anne's main channel.

Visually, I enjoy how the form of the stream's turbulence, which appears to mirror the vegetative roots through which it falls.





Figure 5.20: *Anne Untitled* (Anne River, January 2015).

Figure 5.21: *Deluge* (2015) is a subsurface image from Condominium Creek, which flows from Mt. Anne westward, to join the Pedder Impoundment near the Huon River's confluence.



Figure 5.21: *Deluge* (2015) (Condominium Creek, January 2015).

The image illustrates the power of water: conveying a surreal, wild energy. Its subject is a space enclosed by falling water, with a floor of bubbles, and enclosing walls of moving water. How can it exist except in the stasis of a photographic image?

To my imagination, it harks back to an older, more intuitive feeling associated with the awful power of wild water: a power far beyond the human capacity to control. We (humans) know instinctively, just like a tiny attached caddis larva, that we must grip, hold fast, and not slip into the vortex. I've often wondered whether insect larvae have an intimation of their impending metamorphosis. Might this not be the basis of our own terror: the realisation that, once the vortex is entered, we can never be the same again?

The waterway that I call Museum Creek should be dead. It was reshaped by bulldozers and littered with logging debris. Then it was immersed for decades under the Gordon Impoundment, its flow dissipated, its channel silted.

That flow returned with the withdrawal of the impounding water and it quickly scoured its bed down to the bare clay. The detrital debris began to sing the changes, with swirling current and effervescent turbulence. Figure 5.22: *The Turbulent Utility of Woody Debris* illustrates the stream's turbulent command of form and detail: its inherent communications. Sunlight highlights the peripatetic calligraphy of air bubbles. Filamentous whiskers of algae wave in the current. It represents an extraordinary fluvial regeneration.





Figure 5.22: *The Turbulent Utility of Woody Debris* (Museum Creek, Gordon Impoundment, September 2015).

Wildness bounces through *A Condominium Portrait* (Figure 5.23), playfully sweeping *Gabnia* fronds into a downstream orientation that combs and calms the turbulence a little.



Figure 5.23: *A Condominium Portrait* (Condominium Creek, January 2015).



Segments of sine waves gallop just above: paragraphs of concordant specular information, modulated by exposure time and propagated by the directive current. Higher in the water column, the aquatic calligraphy becomes less coherent, more like jottings and scribbles: the marginal notes of a turbulent page, bordered by a vaguely refracted caricature of the world above the surface.

The Boyes River enters the Gordon Impoundment a few kilometres west of the Gordon River's own inflow. Like all of Gordon's tributaries, it traverses the impoundment's extensive littoral, a distance of more than a kilometre.

Figure 5.24: *Boyes Untitled* exposes myriad specular highlights created by this cataract. The turbulence draws the eye and the imagination. It suggests a convoluted chaos, as the gravity driven flow first plunges, and then erupts upward. Other, contrary energies are evident: diverting, swirling, and defeating my simple analysis. The river's poetry is its own: singular, bright, heedless.



Figure 5.24: *Boyes Untitled* (Boyes River, Gordon Impoundment, January 2015).

My imagination ponders what this reach of the river would look like if the riparian vegetation were still alive and intact; adding shade, detritus, and the murmur of the wind to the stream's diverse articulations.

In Chapter 4: *Evolution / An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water Discursive Threads / Information and Imperceptibility*, I discussed the perceptual transition from form to detail in flowing water and its relationship with water velocity and shutter speed. For Figure 5.25: *The Textured Surfaces of Bubbles in the Boyd River*, I chose a fast shutter speed in a high velocity flow to record detail as well as form.



Figure 5.25: *The Textured Surfaces of Bubbles in the Boyd River* (Boyd River, Ragged Basin, Gordon Impoundment, September 2015).

Individual bubbles have been captured. These show not only their shape (rarely spherical) but also intricate details of the surface of many. The variety of striations and irregular surfaces is intriguing. This adds a further serendipitous element to the representation of water's wildness.



In Figure 5.26, ribbons of turbulence snake their way through the water column before rising surface-wards from the deep darkness of the Huon River, downstream of the Scotts Peak Dam.

*Huon Untitled* offers neither scale nor orientation. The apparent forward motion of the calligraphic traces suggests image depth. The void-like blackness acts to isolate and highlight the calligraphic traces.

I imagine the information radiating in this image, expounded upstream and then funnelled by current and obstacle, to be proclaimed in an upward breath: perhaps to burst noisily to the surface, or to be further encrypted by some other obstacle.



Figure 5.26: *Huon Untitled* (Huon River downstream of the Pedder Impoundment, January 2015).

*Anne Untitled 2* (Figure 5.27) is a relatively simple image from the Anne River. Specular highlights streak diagonally across the frame against a background of burnt orange and dark blue.



Figure 5.27: *Anne Untitled 2* (Anne River, January 2015).

The absence of any discernible object to provide scale or orientation opens interpretation to speculation and imagination. The chorus of traces weaves across the image: harmonising and separating; chanting the signature of this cataract.

Figure 5.28: *Untitled (Inversion Experiment 3)* allows ambiguity and imagination to produce an interpretable representation of this inverted image from Condominium Creek.

I feel that the image gains an expressive, imagined narrative in this orientation, which suggests the form of a mountain or wave. This eminence is outlined by myriad short white lines, which imply edges and depth.





Figure 5.28: *Untitled (Inversion Experiment 5)* (inverted, Condominium Creek, January 2015).

The soft-focused foreground supports this interpretation with substantial lead-in shapes. Other energy lines may be rain or snow swirling about the sky, which is invoked by apparent bands of clouds and sunrise colouring.

This image offers a different, and equally intelligible, interpretation in its original orientation. It is my contention that an image like this inhabits an interpretive littoral between the human need to recognise patterns and an extra-human set of processes, indicated by turbulence, that represent flowing water's diversity of communications and its dynamic formal attributes. That is, the image is interpretable in both aesthetic and greater-than-human tropes. It suggests that there is an entire universe of processes that are usually beyond the ken of humanity and that are brought into our awareness by the intervention of the camera's technology.

Figure 5.29: *Untitled* (Inversion Experiment 25) is another example of how inversion can produce a congruent and different narrative from that of its original orientation. Lacking any structural features that might provide interpretive cues, this spatially ambiguous image relies on imagination to provide scale, depth and narrative.



Figure 5.29: *Untitled* (Inversion Experiment 25) (inverted, Condominium Creek, November 2015).

In my interpretation, the image has a relatively calm feeling, supported by the light-blue lead in and the apparent stillness of the 'floor' to the lower left. It also lacks solidity. It's hard to imagine walking in this space. And that raises the question of how the (imagined) interior space is sustained, and how it was created in the first place.

## A Performative Work

As introduced in Chapter 4: *Evolution / Representation / Voice and Vision: Speaking of Place*, some aspects of the project required a different mode of representation.

One such place was the Huon River, which has had its headwaters impounded and diverted, and which displayed such a complex array of riverine, and lacustrine, ecosystems that it warranted presentation as a performative work.

The heritage of such works originates from the audio-visual slide shows that were my first introduction to Tasmania's southwest and, in particular, to the issues surrounding the drowning of the original Lake Pedder. They also draw on the literary field of place writing, which has developed from oral traditions of storytelling. In keeping with the storytelling tradition, such works provide an experiential event when presented in person, where an immediate, two-way connection between speaker and audience is able to operate.

Like my photographic prints, this work has its narrative couched in the ecocentric conception of humanity's inseparability from, and responsibilities toward, wild Otherness.

### *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River*

The headwaters of the Huon River are a primary source of inflow for the Pedder Impoundment. None of its water is intentionally returned to the river, starving the watercourse for many kilometres downstream of the Scotts Peak Dam.

A small, uncontrolled leakage escapes the dam and provides a meagre, nascent source for this curtailed river. *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River* is a poetic narrative: a many-layered story of the Huon River, as it makes a very

personal, and simultaneously exoteric, progress from source to impoundment, from resurgence to the sea.

This work was presented at the *Land Dialogues* conference, held at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga in April 2016. A text version of the performative work was subsequently submitted to the peer-reviewed online journal, *Fusion*, and was accepted for publication without amendment. It was published in *Fusion Journal* Issue 10 (December 2016): 414-432. A copy of this work, as published, is provided in Appendix A. The URL is:

<http://scci.csu.edu.au/fusionjournal/issue/010-fusion-land-dialogues-interdisciplinary-research-in-dialogue-with-land/> .

As a highly personal and experiential undertaking, this work expresses notions of self and place that actively include non-human agencies. Such works extend narrative beyond the anthropocentric, to produce what Plumwood (2002, p. 54) described as:

certain kinds of imaginative literature which write nature as agent, re-subjectivising and re-intentionalising the nonhuman as an ethical and intentional subject of narrative.



## Research Questions Revisited

Chapter 1: *Foundations / Rationale / Research Questions* lists the four research questions that both guided and directed the project.

### **Question 1: Re-presenting Water's Wildness**

The first question speaks initially of water as an agent of climate, and aspects of mist, cloud and storm formed a key part of the re-presentation of divergence in the Pedder Impoundment (see *The Photographic Prints / The Pedder Impoundment: Water's Engineered Persistence*, above).

The topic of water's wildness was explored to a fuller extent than I originally conceived when I first posed the research question. Chapter 4: *Evolution / An Immersive Approach to Re-presenting Water* describes my explorations.

Visual representations of water's wildness form a significant part of the project's outcomes, and these are detailed in *The Photographic Prints / Water's Communicative Wildness*, above. This is a core topic of my thesis, not least because the conceptual threads woven around it lead to outcomes that have relevance in both anthropocentric and ecocentric paradigms. Flowing water is an appropriate metaphor for wildness and a viable window into extra-human Otherness.

### **Questions 2 & 3: The Impoundments**

The second and third questions deal directly with the impoundments. In Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places*, I detailed the operational regimes of the impoundments, and their underlying anthropogenic drivers. I concluded that the Pedder Impoundment has experienced a legislatively prescribed, precisely engineered, persistent presence of water. In contrast, the Gordon Impoundment has

experienced conditions arising from an extensive, market-driven withdrawal of water.

Aspects of the Pedder Impoundment's persistent water regime are represented in the examination exhibition's photographic prints (see *The Photographic Prints / Water's Engineered Persistence: The Pedder Impoundment*, above). Other consequences of impoundment are presented in *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River* (see *A Performative Work*, above).

The Gordon Impoundment's market-driven withdrawal story is represented in the exhibition prints (see *The Photographic Prints / Water's Market-driven Withdrawal: The Gordon Impoundment*, above).

So, for research question 2, the divergent trajectories of the impoundments are driven by the different management regimes applied to their water levels. For research question 3, the regenerative, preservative and, at times, destructive processes associated with water's wildness are key factors overlaying the anthropogenic processes identified in question 2.

#### **Question 4: Furthering Visual Discourse**

The fourth research question is addressed by the summation of the three main discursive threads that the project investigated: water's wildness; its persistent presence; and its extensive withdrawal.

Wildness demonstrates the dependence of humanity on, and its interconnections with, the Other. It shows the linkages between humanity's somewhat narcissistic environmental myopia, characterised as anthropocentrism, and a much broader ecocentric perception along which path affective landscape imagery has long

trodden, and which is extended by the *Water's Communicative Wildness* artworks (see above).

On a slightly separate track, the discourse surrounding the juxtaposition of large-scale industrial artefacts within otherwise wild areas has been extended by the project's investigation of water's engineered persistence and its market-driven withdrawal. These divergent pathways, and the visual discourses that arise from them, provide an eloquent surrogate for the broader, ongoing discussion on the ways humanity deals with the extra-human world.

## 6 Gnosis

### Introduction

In concluding the exegesis, this chapter discusses my thesis' significance, as well as the project's outcomes and their relevance.

*An Analysis of Outcomes* summarises the project's developmental pathways and its resolution. *The Thesis' Significance* is discussed in terms of its original contribution to the representation of place in the field of landscape photography, and its innovative exploration of subsurface aquatic imagery. *The Relevance of the Project's Outcomes* addresses the project's relevance to pertinent ontological and societal discourses.

## An Analysis of Outcomes

In Chapter 1: *Foundations / Rationale / An Objective*, I indicated that:

The overall objective of my project was to produce a body of work that reflected my perceptions of, and responses to, aspects of the impoundments' divergent visual trajectories and the wild processes affecting them and their associated catchments.

The examination exhibition presented that body of work, and Chapter 5:

*Revelation* detailed the provenance of the individual works. This section discusses how these works relate to the salient theoretical and conceptual discourses with which the exegesis has entangled them.

Within the project's overarching theme of *Wildness and Artefact*, I set out to explore how the impoundments had differentially evolved over the more than forty years since their creation. I photographed aspects of water as the common element in my investigations: as cloud, mist, wetlands, streams, and, in the Gordon Impoundment, its absence.

Throughout, I sought to apply an ecocentric perspective to the representations of wildness interacting with an overtly human-modified environment. This approach considers the theoretical inquiries of Chapter 2: *Theoria*, and reflects the discourse between *Environmental Advocacy* and *Wilderness Deconstructed* that I pursued in Chapter 3: *Praxis*.

The exhibition of the photographic prints in coherent groups related to key elements of the project's visual discourse – Gordon and Pedder's divergent trajectories and water's communicative wildness – situated the works within the context of those temporal narratives. This approach aligned with John Berger's (2001b, p. 292) alternative photography model (see Chapter 2: *Theoria* /

*Photography & Ways of Not-knowing*), as a means of subverting commodification by becoming part of social and political memory.

All of the artworks arising from this project derive from my personal experiential approach, guided by receptivity and solitude. They reflect my own emotional engagement with the place through its wildness and artificiality, which is congruent with Walch's (2005, p. 6) suggestions for offering new ways of seeing: of re-presentation.

One key aspect that I chose to pursue along a challenging and innovative path was flowing water's dynamic nature and its relationship to perceptions of wild Otherness. The outcomes of these explorations, the set of photographic prints addressing *Water's Communicative Wildness*, illustrate the energy flows of turbulent water: the bubbling, life-giving gaseous entrainment, and the resultant 'calligraphic' texts that, to me, illustrate extra-human communication and information channels that exist in flowing water.

In this process, I explored my bio-evolutionary, and culturally derived, visual preferences. I considered how these might differ from those of aquatic organisms. I also considered how such representations might act to expand human perceptions of the subsurface environment as a subset of the extra-human world.

In short, the outcomes of my project have achieved their goal. And they have done this in ways that accord with propositions from various authoritative voices in the fields of art theory, landscape photography, ecocentrism, and place writing. That conceptual support enabled my exploration and innovative expression of subsurface imagery with its extra-human connotations.

## The Thesis' Significance

My thesis comprehensively represents the visual effects of more than forty years of hydro-industrial operations in the Pedder and Gordon Impoundments of southwest Tasmania. In the Pedder Impoundment, the project evaluated the visual outcomes of engineering and political decisions made at the commencement of the power scheme, and maintained since through legislative requirements. In the Gordon Impoundment, the project demonstrated the impact of market forces on water levels. It also explored the wild processes that came into operation as the impoundment's water was withdrawn, and confirmed the preservative facility of impoundment.

Both within and beyond the impoundments, the project investigated ways of representing the dynamic expressions of wildness evident in flowing water. This was a novel undertaking: one that required the development of effective subsurface photographic techniques.

My project extends discourse on Tasmanian landscape photography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with an emphasis on wild locations. In particular, the thesis adds to the discourse on perceptions of industrial artefacts associated with wild areas, and the unacknowledged costs and consequences of renewable energy.

In summary, I perceive three areas in which my thesis offers significant original outcomes. The first is through my personal, experiential representations of the place, and its various permutations of wildness and artefact. The second arises from my original approaches to aspects of that representation (e.g., sub-surface imagery). The third is that it advances discourse on humanity's interrelationships with the extra-human world.

## The Relevance of the Project's Outcomes

### Ontological Discourse

In terms of the anthropocentric/ecocentric discourse, my project pursued diverse approaches to representation.

The first is expressed in literal visual imagery where pragmatic, rational and quotidian narratives are represented. It is in *re-presentation* that such imagery conceptually advances beyond the constraints of anthropocentrism.

The second is an instinctive, non-rational, poetic imagery that is informed by the conception of humanity's inseparability from the wild Other. It is within this ecocentric approach that wildness becomes a key descriptor, and terms like artefact and (the modern perception of) wilderness become largely irrelevant.

Both of the above are valuable, indeed interwoven, conceptions.

A third approach is in the project's performative work, *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River*, which extends narrative beyond the anthropocentric and interweaves it with the imagined desires of the extra-human world. I consider this a rich field for further research and exploration.

### Societal Discourse

#### *Renewable Energy*

My project contributes to the ongoing societal discourse surrounding renewable energy: its hidden costs and unexpected consequences.

Forms of renewable energy generation, such as hydropower, are increasingly needed to reduce global carbon dioxide production. The Gordon Power Scheme,



and its attendant artefacts, is a major contributor to Tasmania's (and, increasingly, Australia's) renewable energy sources.

The long-term consequences of this power development form a key topic of my thesis. The discussion in Chapter 4: *Evolution / Places* details how the water level regime in the Pedder Impoundment was designed and then legislated prior to its creation. In the Gordon Impoundment, the recent adoption of market trading has substantially modified how its water level is managed.

The photographic prints representing the divergence between the Gordon and Pedder Impoundments demonstrate some of these consequences (see Chapter 5: *Revelation / The Photographic Prints*). By uncovering the Gordon Impoundment's extensive littoral, the recent, historically low water levels have exposed some of the forgotten environmental costs of the area's inundation.

A critical step in moving perceptions beyond simplistic, short-term, anthropocentric rationalisations is to acknowledge a tacit responsibility for the resources that are utilised for humanity's benefit. To my mind, it is the respectful and responsible use of those resources that marks a sustainable society. Part of that sustainability is to understand and acknowledge those aspects of anthropogenic exploitation that society often chooses to ignore or forget. An ecocentric conceptual paradigm offers an alternative channel for responses to such challenges: responsibly, with clear knowledge and understanding of humanity's actions and their broader, extra-human consequences.

My research has shown that, given time and half a chance, wild processes will act on the hydro-industrial artefacts to modify and evolve: to drive processes of

regeneration (or destruction). These are cyclic, dynamic processes to which human wants and desires are, in the long-term, irrelevant.

### *River Regulation*

Globally, the extensive regulation of rivers, through damming and diversion, has long been considered an indicator of humanity's problematic domination of the planet's natural systems (see, e.g., Crutzen 2002). Turning wild rivers into regulated artefacts inevitably affects non-human organisms and processes, both in the waterway and within the artefacts created.

The dammed rivers, Huon, Serpentine and Gordon, are impacted by the current hydropower operations. The Serpentine River is almost totally inundated; the remainder is dewatered. The Huon is completely diverted, starving the downstream river channel, while the downstream Gordon River is impacted by the power station's episodic discharge regime. Each river calls out for more appropriate management, beginning with an environmentally relevant discharge regime from the dams. The performative artwork, *A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River*, speaks to this topic.

My artworks indicate a need for the consequences of impoundment and river regulation to be rethought. As globally significant entities, it is ethically important to consider the needs of rivers beyond the narrow confines of renewable energy generation.

*Environmental Management*

Through the exhibited and published works, my project also extends discourse on the environmental management associated with the TWWHA in general and these impoundments in particular.

The civilisation/wilderness duality that informed environmental management in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has generally failed to produce the results to which it aspired (see, e.g. Plumwood 2002; Escobar 1999). Nevertheless, it still forms the basis for the environmental management of the TWWHA, which includes the Pedder Impoundment.

The recent revision of the TWWHA Management Plan (DPIPWE 2016) includes a greater acknowledgement of indigenous peoples' concerns and considerations. There is scope for it to embrace a more ecocentric perspective towards the area's extra-human entities.

*Environmental Restoration*

The findings from my research offer new information relevant to contemporary discourse on the restoration of the original Lake Pedder. The subsurface stability and preservative nature of the impounding waters in the Gordon Impoundment's Ragged Basin indicate that such could well be the case in the Pedder Impoundment. This finding supports the reported structural preservation of the original Lake Pedder (Kiernan, 2001, pp. 156, 173).

The ready regeneration evident in both terrestrial and fluvial systems in the Gordon Impoundment's littoral suggests that the wild rehabilitation of Pedder's

littoral should be equally dynamic, primarily self-generated, and effective over the medium term.

These regionally relevant environmental findings would work effectively with the changed operating patterns of post-Basslink power generation to obviate the need for, and maximise the financial benefit of accessing, the 3 km<sup>3</sup> of presently inaccessible water in the Pedder impoundment. This financial windfall would significantly contribute to funding the original lake's restoration.

The above factors, based on this project's research into the divergence between impoundments, offer geomorphic, biotic, and financial opportunities for restoration that can be easily, and substantially, fleshed out in a more appropriate forum. Such restoration efforts would be profoundly significant in Australian political, social, and environmental firmaments.

Restoration of the original lake would also offer a cogent next chapter in the aesthetic representation of wildness and artefact in this place. Put simply, it would act to further interweave the threads of environmental advocacy and deconstructed wilderness that were discussed in Chapter 3 *Praxis*, and refined in the thesis' exhibition photography (see Chapter 5 *Revelation / The Photographic Prints / The Gordon Impoundment: Water's Market-driven Withdrawal*).

## A Gnostic Conclusion

*Wildness and Artefact: Re-presenting the Divergent Trajectories of Lakes Gordon and Pedder.*

My project interwove itself amongst the above titular concerns. It teased at the threads, attempted to cut some (e.g. the stigma associated with modern wilderness photography) and emphasise others (e.g. an ecocentric perspective). Above all, it sought to expose and represent an authentic pattern deep within the weave: dynamic, poetic, personal, and ultimately, revealing.

I find myself speaking in the past tense, as if the research process was undertaken like a recipe, with a defined outcome that I would momentarily present: as if I knew what I was doing all along. Hopefully, the discussion in Chapter 4: *Evolution* dispelled that notion.

What I write about my thesis' significance and the project's relevance will therefore be half-truths, strewn with more than a whiff of egotism, as I try to impart in rational (objective, unemotional, anthropocentric) terms the actuality of my project. Such is the nature of an exegesis.

My practice-based project was an undertaking that I actively sought to make anything but rational, as my representational development indicates. Its primary achievement is that it offers a partial translation of a less-than-completely comprehended set of processes, interactions, and not-knowns, described using an imperfectly developed visual dialectic.

The project examined how the littoral areas of the two impoundments visually expressed the interactions between wild processes and their artificially driven

water level regimes. It represented consequences of the engineered, persistent presence (Pedder) or market-driven withdrawal (Gordon) of water.

The project is significant in that it explored the effects of more than forty years of hydropower impoundment in this part of Tasmania's southwest. Representing the dynamic expressions of wildness in flowing water was also a novel pursuit.

The investigative processes and their outcomes contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse surrounding conceptions of wildness and of artefact, and their affective representation. Such outcomes are broadly applicable to the fields of landscape photography in a global context. More specifically, they are applicable to perceptions of wildness in landscapes associated with large-scale renewable energy artefacts installed in close association with iconic wild areas.

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# Appendix A:

## A Huon Dialogue: Re-presentations of a Truncated River

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